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MPS SOARs: Facilitating Elementary Transition due to Building Closures in a Positive and Productive Way

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MPS SOARs: Facilitating Elementary Transition due to Building Closures in a Positive and Productive Way

Abstract

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Keywords

MPS SOARs, school, elementary, appreciative inquiry, group morale, optimism, school consolidation, school closure, education, Midland Public Schools

Disciplines

Other Teacher Education and Professional Development

MPS SOARs:

Facilitating Elementary Transition due to Building Closures in a Positive and Productive Way

Kathy Snyder

University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Daniel S. Bowling III

August 1, 2010

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Midland Public Schools (MPS) SOARS

Introduction

The stars aligned one snowy evening in February 2010. I remember it today as vividly as the moment it happened. I have just finished a solid first semester leaning the fundamentals of positive psychology and am beginning to learn about the process of Appreciative Inquiry as a student in the Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) program at the University of Pennsylvania. I am sitting on the plane heading to a MAPP on-site in Philadelphia trying to read *The Appreciative Inquiry Summit* (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003). I struggle to attend to the content because my mind keeps wandering to a troubling situation back in Michigan. I read about positive transformational change in organizations and I think about the rocky transition my school district is going through. I read about the power of anticipating the future but worry about the future of Midland Public Schools after it closes five elementary schools in the fall. As I kept going back and forth, I see the lights of Philadelphia come into view and it hits me: I have the solution in my hands. The principles of Appreciative Inquiry are the key to a smooth transition for Midland Public Schools. I am ready for the plane to land and class to begin. MAPP 709: Positive Psychology and Institutions will help me develop a concrete goal.

Goal

The goal I formulated was an intervention designed to build positive work environments to benefit students, teachers, administrators, and the community using empirically-based methods. Two specific interventions targeted the elementary school teachers. The first, MPS SOARs I was designed to end the 2009-2010 school year with an attitude of hope and moments of positive reflection on the past. The second, MPS SOARs II, was focused on beginning the 2010-2011

school year by building positive group morale within each elementary building, assisting building administrators in formulating school improvement goals for the new school environments, and continuing to provide exemplary education to students. Appreciative Inquiry is the chosen mode of intervention. Later sections will detail research used to justify this type of intervention.

SITUATIONAL BACKGROUND

In order to better understand the need for intervention, several factors must be understood, including the way that schools are funded in Michigan, the way decisions are made in Midland Public Schools, teacher/administration communication, and union president/teacher communication.

School Funding

Michigan school finances are in a state of crisis. Over a decade ago, school funding, which had traditionally been through assessments on property taxes at the local level, was changed to state funding through increased sales taxes and several other sources of state revenue (Michigan in Brief, 2002). The intent was to provide equity in school funding across the state (in theory to raise poorer districts up to the level of the more affluent ones), but sadly it did the opposite. It has significantly jeopardized the quality of programming in successful school districts around the state, in large part due to the unstable funding sources and the current recession. In addition to this change, Midland Public Schools was also part of a tax abatement lawsuit, which further threatened our funding, as we had to set aside millions of dollars to pay back to a local company if it was found that they were taxed improperly. Midland Public Schools is struggling to make ends meet not only in current budgets, but also in planning for future funding for these reasons.



Additionally, the Midland area (and Michigan in general) is experiencing a changing demographic. The trend in the area is toward more retirees and fewer families combined with falling birth rates, which will result in significantly declining enrollment in our student body over the next ten years. Much of our school funding is also based on the number of pupils in our district. This combination has led to an imploding budget and no light at the end of the tunnel (Cline, 2010). With 12 elementary school buildings running at 70% capacity, it makes strong financial sense to consolidate those 12 elementary schools down to seven with near full capacity. While change may be necessary, it does not necessarily mean it is easy.

Midland Public Schools

Midland Public Schools, like many large school organizations, is steeped in bureaucracy. While the school district overall is very successful, decisions tend to be made at the top by people who have either never been in a classroom (board members) or who have not been in a classroom for many years (directors and superintendent). School working conditions are very important to teacher satisfaction and efficacy (Ingersoll, 2001). While teachers are overall a very professional group of people, the undermining of morale can have negative effects on their ability to teach effectively (Peterson, Park, & Sweeney, 2008). The powerlessness and sense of futility surrounding many of their hopes and dreams for the school creates a group of teachers who see their work as a job, certainly not a calling (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997). Wrzesniewski's research shows that people with a calling orientation tend to perform better than those with a job orientation (2003).

Unfortunately, there has been much criticism surrounding the way the decision to close buildings was made in our district. During the 2008 – 2009 school year, it was announced (virtually without warning), that several specific elementary buildings would close in the 2009-

2010 school year (McGuire, 2009). After an outpouring of community outrage, the school board decided to rescind this mandate and instead put together a committee that would be responsible for coming up with various consolidation scenarios (Bryant, 2009a).

Making decisions from the top without the input of the staff or community has become a fairly typical mode of operation for our school district. As another way to reduce costs, several years ago the school board made a decision to significantly cut after school programs for middle school children. In a time in their lives when kids are deciding who they are and what they belong too (Marcia, 1966), they need more opportunities – not less (Niven, Fawcner, Knowles, & Henretty, 2009). While cuts may have been necessary, as a parent, teacher, and coach in the district, I was extremely frustrated that other money-saving ideas were not investigated before making such extreme decisions. A similar blow was faced in December when the district abruptly announced mid-year layoffs (Bryant, 2010). Teachers and building administrators alike were only informed of the decision after it had been made and again, no one below the administrative level was asked for our money saving ideas (M. Brooks, personal communication, February 10, 2010).

In general, bad news is easier to take if you feel like you had a say in the decision, in this case, if teachers feel empowered (Zemelman & Ross, 2009). In this situation, a great deal of controversy and hard feelings existed over the schools that were chosen for closure (Bryant, 2009b). Even at the end of the school year – long after the school closings were announced, my children's principal said he was completely unprepared for the news that our school would be closing (J. Huber, personal communication, June 3, 2010). It didn't seem possible, and he and



many others believe politics fueled the decision rather than common sense or logical long-term planning (J. Huber, personal communication, March 12, 2010).

Adding to our sense of frustration about the situation was our Midland County Education Association (MCEA) union president. While well-intentioned, her “platform” was and is negative and confrontational. The only contact the regular teacher had with her was through email, unless you attended a periodic meeting. The tone of every meeting and email was negative. “Lawmakers return- attacks continue” (personal email communication, April 14, 2010), “Capitol Chaos” (personal email communication, May 5, 2010) and “Enough is Enough” (personal email communication, May 18, 2010) were typical email subject titles. It was difficult to feel empowered when one constantly was given the impression that teachers were under attack.

After the school closings were announced, it became clear to me through talking to my principal (who is a former elementary principal and attends district meetings with principals of all levels) and our building union representative, that there was no plan to help the teachers make a successful transition during this consolidation process. When I asked our building union representative if there was any plan to help the teachers with the transition, she spoke of the district’s plan to hire movers. Upon further questioning, it was clear that neither our teachers union nor central administration had plans to address this process of transition, which would certainly involve grieving, traditional group stages, transition, and many other positive psychology topics. A transition committee had been set up, but their focus was on the tangible logistics of moving the teachers and materials, not mentally preparing the teachers for the move.

RESEARCH

General psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior research

Before discussing the specifics of the intervention, it is important to review its theoretical and scientific basis. In this section, I will discuss the major general psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior research findings applicable to the intervention I designed to assist with the MPS transition process.

Stages of Grief

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1973) outlined various stages of grief that people go through when faced with a loss. While her theory has been modified over the years, the basic idea is that there are general stages of emotion that many people experience in these situations: denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, and acceptance. People spend widely varying amounts of time in these stages, experience them in differing order, and certainly can bounce around the stages at various points.

In my conversations with teachers and students from both remaining and closing schools, these stages were evident. Additionally, there was confusion and anxiety about the unknown. For example, my son's teacher has been in the same school, in the same classroom, teaching the same grade for 28 years. Not only was she going to have to physically move to a different school (which involved many of the grief stages), she also had no idea for several months where she was going or what grade she would be teaching in the next school year. Worst of all, the process to make those decisions was unnecessarily slow and the method was not ideal, which made it difficult to make plans and accept the imminent changes.

Resilience in the Face of Loss



More recent research suggests that these stages of grief are not absolute (Bonanno, Wortman, Lehman, Tweed, Haring, Sonnegga, Carr, & Nesse, 2002). In fact, bouncing back or showing strong signs of resilience was the most common response pattern in a correlational study of 205 individuals – measuring responses both pre-loss and up to 18-months post-loss (Bonanno, et al, 2002). While some people certainly go through the stages of grief, others like those in the aforementioned study, show resilience in the face of loss. Three kinds of coping strategies that can facilitate resiliency are: positive reappraisal, problem-focused coping, and finding the positive in everyday events (Frederickson, 2001).

For example, a teacher who participated in MPS SOARs demonstrated resilience in her evaluation: “I appreciate the necessity to consolidate buildings, and I’m sure everyone will continue to work professionally to create a welcome environment for students and teachers alike. I try to live my life according to the words of St. Francis – give me courage to change what I can, accept what I cannot, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Group Stages

It is typical for groups to go through 5 stages of development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman, 1965). These stages are typical whether the group is a small one for a short period of time, or a group of people that have worked together for a long time period.

This information was particularly important to recognize when dealing with the adjourning at the end of the 2009-2010 school year as well as the forming stage at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year. The re-staffing process was done according to union seniority in the district. Of the seven remaining elementary buildings, no one’s position was set in stone. All elementary teachers received a time slot where they were to go to the Administration Center and sign up for

a school and for a grade range (K-2 or 3-6). While this was according to union mandate, it caused a great deal of shuffling in some schools and in the 2010-2011 school year all buildings in the district are experiencing either teachers leaving or new teachers entering. These five stages will also be important to attend to as principals plan for the next school year.

Good business

Good businesses, as characterized by Csikszentmihalyi (in Foster & Lloyd, 2007), encourage employee empowerment, provide opportunities for states of flow by employees, allow for skill development, and overall incorporate work for the greater good. Strong leaders of good businesses demonstrate: “optimism, integrity, ambition, perseverance, curiosity, empathy, gratitude, faith on overall purpose, and caring for others” (Foster & Lloyd, 2007, p. 37). Overall, teacher empowerment is achieved when, as quoted by Zemelman & Ross (2009, p. x):

1. We’re teaching what we enjoy and know is important, to kids we respect-and we can see they are learning.
2. We’re treated like professional, feel like professionals, and have the tools to succeed.
3. We have strategies for carving out time for reflection and healthy exercise.
4. We collaborate with our colleagues to make our teaching more fruitful.
5. We feel in control of our professional lives and encourage others to be successful – in other words, we are exercising informal leadership.
6. We love to go to work.

One teacher in her evaluation commented that in her building she felt empowered in her building because of her principal, but in reference to Midland Public Schools as a whole, she felt



powerless and frustrated. MPS SOARs was designed to help these teachers start to work on the components of good business and teacher empowerment.

Positive Psychology Research

In thinking about how to be of service in my school district, positive psychology provided many possibilities. As defined by Peterson, positive psychology is “the scientific study of what goes right in life” (2006, p. 4). A wide variety of positive psychology theories applied to this situation and helped to provide direction on the type of positive intervention that would be the most useful to the school district, but more importantly to the staff and teachers facing this enormous transition. I felt it was important to both help teachers reflect positively on their past experiences, drawing on their personal strengths, and look optimistically toward what the future can hold. Research in positive psychology supported these ideas as will be outlined below. The research pointed to a particular type of intervention that would be effective in this situation, Appreciative Inquiry (AI). After discussing the research basis, I will explain the use of AI both in theory and as applied to MPS SOARs.

Positive Health

First and foremost, I was concerned about the health of my colleagues (both physical and mental). Chronic stress is not good for the body or the mind (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). With the looming threat of elementary school closures for two years, an underlying level of stress has been going through all of us for better than a year. While not able to reduce the sources of stress, perhaps encouraging a more optimistic explanatory style (Steptoe, Dockray, & Wardle, 2009) or providing opportunities for staff to focus on positive emotions might buffer them from some of the effects of stress (Xu & Roberts, 2010). A variety of studies over the years, related to

influenza, heart disease, and HIV/AIDS have shown that there are significant links between positive affect and physical health (Steptoe, Dockray, and Wardle, 2009).

In the participant evaluations, one teacher commented that she certainly would have enjoyed MPS SOARs more if she didn't have the stress of packing her classroom in the back of her mind. Stress can certainly override positive emotions and particularly when uncontrollable or overwhelming, have adverse affects on physical health (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008).

Peak-end

Research shows that how an event ends as well as peak experiences throughout can significantly impact the overall memory of the event and the feeling surrounding it (Diener, Wirtz, & Oishi, 2001). In this school closing situation, the overall atmosphere of this year has been adversarial, anxious, and negative. The hope was that drawing out positive experiences and memories of the past would help teachers to close the 2009-2010 school year with an overall positive feeling in their equation of the year. Memory research helps to understand why peak-end theory is important. Schacter, Chiao, and Mitchell (2003) describe seven sins of memory. Relevant to peak end theory is the idea of distortion. What we feel and understand currently about a person, event, or situation can distort our recollections of memories related to that person, event, or situation in the past.

This was particularly relevant for the many retirees in the district. One teacher in a building I facilitated had been a kindergarten teacher for 42 years and was retiring. While for most participants the peak-end theory applied to the end of the 2009-2010 school year, for this particular teacher it was the end of a long career. It was important to help her and others end their



career, and certainly the 2009-2010 year on a “good note” rather than simply ending with the frustrations and sadness associated with the school closings.

Broaden and Build

Frederickson’s research (2009) shows that positivity matters. While recognizing that negative emotions exist and have their value, a life spent dwelling on the negative is not a satisfying one. The broaden and build theory proposes that increasing positive experiences and emotions to a 3:1 ratio will overall help to broaden scopes of thinking and increase well-being and life satisfaction (Frederickson, 2009). Upward spirals exist when positive emotions are attended to and fostered. When people are in a positive and supportive environment, they are overall more generative, creative, and open to new ideas from others (Foster & Lloyd, 2007). Frederickson linked several positive emotions to their broadening and building effects: interest fosters focused attention and exploration, joy leads to play or celebrating, and pride leads to anticipation and optimism (Foster & Lloyd, 2007).

Using strategies to bring these positive emotions out in the elementary staff helped many to ease their transition and to look forward to building strong new relationships in the fall. In evaluations, several teachers appreciated the chance to share what is going well after a year of feeling dragged down.

Group Morale

Many factors contribute to the development of positive group morale such as purpose, optimism, self-efficacy, role clarity, participative decision-making, and opportunities (Peterson, Park & Sweeney, 2008). Specific to education, “role clarity, recognition, participative decision-making, a reasonable work load, effective disciplinary policies, successful students, a coherent

curriculum and the opportunity for professional growth all strengthen the morale of teachers” (Peterson, Park & Sweeney, 2008, p. 27).

A strong transition plan needed to include components that would foster these factors. MPS SOARs I began the process of building a cohesive staff by focusing on some of these major components of group morale and will focus more on this in MPS SOARs II. One teacher commented that MPS SOARs “was the beginning of some necessary steps needed to re-build the morale and spirit of our staff”.

Character Strengths

Recognizing the character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) of individuals and organizations helps to focus on what is right rather than dwelling on what is wrong. Character strengths are 24 positive traits that individuals can possess in varying levels, such as self-regulation and kindness (Peterson, 2006). Related to education, effective teachers tend to exhibit higher levels of zest, humor, and social intelligence (Seligman, 2009). Additionally, focusing on teacher strengths leads to engagement and hope which lead to increased effort and productivity which increases student success (Lopez, 2010). An effective intervention would bring out the strengths in the teaching staff and fuse those strengths into a positive and productive school culture.

MPS SOARs I did not directly address character strengths, although many were brought out both in discussions and upon reflection in the participant evaluations. Words like dedication, passion, kindness, humor, acceptance, teamwork, and leadership were noticed and appreciated by the staff.

Collective Efficacy



The belief that a group can accomplish goals, or collective efficacy, is an extension of self-efficacy theory (Maddux, 2009). Specifically related to education, in schools where teacher collective efficacy is high, student achievement is affected positively (Bandura, 1993).

Interestingly, Bandura also found that teacher longevity plays an important role as well. While having a minimal, yet positive effect on student achievement, teacher longevity also is negatively associated with collective efficacy (Bandura, 1993).

With a relatively seasoned MPS staff, fostering positive group goals would be an important part of a smooth transition. In every building working together to benefit kids was the top priority and a clear hope for the future.

Resilience

Individual, group and organizational resilience are important topics in education (Armstrong, 2006). Many icebergs and thinking traps (Reivich & Shatté, 2002) are clear and well-known in the teaching profession. According to Bandura, “teaching longevity...seems to create in teachers a jaundiced view of their schools’ collective instructional efficacy” (1993, p. 143). It is common for mentor teachers to advise new teachers to stay out of the lunchroom, because many teachers go to the lunchroom to vent (Armstrong, 2006). In stark contrast to the broaden and build theory of positive emotions, some of these “us and them” icebergs that teachers hold can severely limit their ability to bounce back from adversity. They simply see it as the way things will always be (Zemelman & Ross, 2009).

MPS SOARs was designed to show a way around these icebergs. It was possible to completely focus on what was right with the teaching profession, even if it was for only an hour and a half. The participant survey showed that the opportunity for positive reflection and focus was appreciated.

Hope

Hope is a construct that is important to an individual's well-being (Lopez, Snyder, Magyar-Moe, Edwards, Pedrotti, Janowski, Turner, & Pressgrove, 2004). Fortunately, hope can be cultivated and can facilitate change in both individuals and organizations (Lopez, et al, 2004) by utilizing four important strategies: hope finding, hope bonding, hope enhancing, and hope reminding.

Specific to the elementary school intervention, it was important to provide opportunities to recognize the hopes of staff, articulate those hopes to a vision of a vibrant school culture, make plans to bring those visions to life, and later to continue those goals through the school improvement process.

Work orientation

Wrzesniewski (2003) divides work attitudes into three areas: job, career, and calling. People with a job orientation do not feel a sense commitment or value to their work. They work for a paycheck. Having a career orientation may be more fulfilling, but again the focus is more extrinsic – raise, promotion, etc. Workers with a calling orientation have a deep sense of meaning and value from their work. It is characterized by higher levels of intrinsic motivation and high levels of engagement (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997). Workers who see their work as a calling rather than just a job tend to perform better, show more commitment, less conflict, better relationships with management (Wrzesniewski, 2003). In terms of groups of workers, the more members of the workers that see their work as a calling tend to have better relationships with management, less conflicts, and stronger group morale (Wrzesniewski, 2003).



MPS SOARs was designed to bring teachers back to the positive core of why they chose this profession, to help to facilitate the resurfacing of a calling mentality. In an appreciation email, an elementary teacher commented that MPS SOARs was “re-energizing”, “terrific” and “will make me a better teacher for the rest of the year and next year.” She further stated that “If the teachers, are happy, confident, etc. the children will blossom”.

Positive Organizational Scholarship

At the University of Michigan, Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn (2003) created Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). Like Seligman, who founded positive psychology as a reaction to or compliment to the deficit (business-as-usual) psychology, POS aims to focus on the strengths and positive aspects of organizations, rather than the deficits. In their book, *Positive Organizational Scholarship*, the basics of this new approach to business and organizations are outlined. Separate authors offer their bits of wisdom in different chapters to help the reader better understand what businesses and organizations can become. In addition to character strengths, broaden and build theory, work orientation, meaningfulness, resilience, and leadership development, POS focuses on organizational change (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003). One facet of this is Appreciative Inquiry, although many other intervention strategies are discussed.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider, Whitney, Stavros, 2008) is a model of transformative change that involves many components of positive psychology. In simplest terms, AI focuses on what is best about organizations, the “life-giving properties of any organization or human system” (Barrett & Fry, 2002, p. 6).

Principles

Appreciative Inquiry is centered around eight principles (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003):

1. *The constructionist principle* – Our reality is created by our language and social interactions with others.
2. *The simultaneity principle* – The intervention is in the questions asked. The way the questions are designed brings out strengths and positive emotions which open new possibilities.
3. *The poetic principle* - People are natural storytellers. AI is designed to capitalize on that tendency to help people create and relay their own stories of strength, hope, and opportunity.
4. *The anticipatory principle* – People are motivated by their future visions and hopes.
5. *The positive principle* – AI unconditionally focuses on the positive. It is not to ignore or pretend that the negative doesn't exist, it is simply to lead people where you want them to go. If you focus on the positive, they will broaden and build, if you focus on the negative, all you see is the negative.
6. *The wholeness principle* – AI respects that all levels in an organization have something important to contribute and that to truly flourish, all levels need to be invested in the process.
7. *The enactment principle* – Acting as you want to be can help that future come to fruition.
8. *The free choice principle* – AI allows for people to choose their level of participation. In its pure form, it is a voluntary endeavor – with levels of participation within. Even in modified forms, when required, for example, one can choose to be very vocal or only make small contributions. What they choose to speak about is also up to them.

Assumptions



The principles of AI are both based on the research outlined in previous sections. Similarly, the following assumptions about organizations and human systems are based on many AI case studies (Reed, 2007, p. 27-28):

1. In every group, something works.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
3. Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
4. The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.
5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
7. It is important to value differences.
8. The language we use creates our reality.

4D Model

In order to effectively utilize the eight principles and recognize the eight assumptions of AI, typically a 4D model is used (Cooperrider, 2010). The four components of the 4D model are: discover, dream, design, and destiny (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008) and are explored through an AI summit. Summits can range in length, but are typically four days long, devoting a day to each of the Ds (Cooperrider, 2010). The number of participants can vary from several to literally thousands, but should try to include as many stakeholders as possible (Cooperrider, 2010). Organizers should also aim to structure the summit so that participants work with people very different from them, a maximum mix of stakeholders (Cooperrider, 2010).

1. Discover – In this first part of AI, participants interview each other to discover the positive core of themselves both as individuals and part of the system. The interview questions are specifically designed to address the needs of the organization, centered around a focused idea or theme for the summit.
2. Dream – After the positive core is discovered, participants are encouraged to dream about what they and their organization can become. To envision a perfect future opens creativity and healthy exchanging of ideas.
3. Design – From the dream phase ideas can be formed into workable ideas and plans. The energy that builds from the discovery and dream phases can be put into action to create a better future.
4. Destiny – Implementation and building from the previous three phases occurs during the destiny phase. The dreams become designed into a reality that is stronger and more positive than it was before. Sustainability of ideas and plans is a key factor for the destiny phase.

Through discussion with Ron Fry (personal communication, February 20, 2010), I decided to divide the focus of the 4D model into two parts: focusing on discovery and dream during MPS SOARs I (end of the 2009-2010 school year) and design and destiny in MPS SOARs II (beginning of 2010-2011) school year. This would better meet the goals of each part of the process.

6 Freedoms

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom put together a list of ideas to explain why AI works (2003). Dubbed the six freedoms, most of these ideas relate directly to both the research described in



earlier sections as well as to the idea that “other people matter” that Peterson notably purports (Peterson, 2006, p. 249):

1. To be known in relationship
2. To be heard
3. To dream in community
4. To choose to contribute
5. To act with support
6. To be positive

As will be discussed in a later section, the six freedoms are key reasons why MPS SOARs was successful. Many of these freedoms were almost direct quotes of the comments people gave for why they appreciated the opportunity to participate in MPS SOARs.

SOAR

The SOAR model (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009) is a modification of the basic AI model. Instead of structured paired interviews, the SOAR model uses small group conversations to address the core ideas. The model can be used in a wide variety of ways with groups that vary widely in size. Additionally, instead of the 4D's, SOAR focuses on:

1. Strengths – What can we build on?
2. Opportunities – What are our stakeholders asking for?
3. Aspiration – What do we care deeply about?
4. Results - How do we know we are succeeding?

-For MPS SOARs the R was changed to Reflection in order to better fit the goal of the first part of the program. (permission by personal communication with Jackie

Stavros, March 5, 2010) for SOAR2 and beyond, it should be back to Results, as the goal will be focused on staff group morale and student achievement.

5I Model

Using a 5-I model is another modification to Appreciative Inquiry model (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009). This model is very action oriented and focused directly on the SOAR acronym.

The five phases of the 5-I model are:

1. Initiate – decide to use the SOAR model
2. Inquire – ask the core strengths-finding questions in small groups
3. Imagine – what opportunities are possible
4. Innovate – reach those aspirations and turn opportunities into reality
5. Inspire to implement – make it happen and measure results

In the case of Midland Public Schools, the SOAR name first was used as a catchy way to label the project. After research into the actual SOAR model, I decided to use the acronym in a modified form for part 1, with the focus on reflection and strengths. Through the discussions, participants' opportunities and aspirations were shared, but since it was shared with the "old" building staffs, it didn't seem realistic to dig too deeply into the dreams and aspirations. Those will be brought back out in MPS SOARs II, which is much more focused on building a positive group morale and strategies for student achievement. The 5-I approach is also being considered for MPS SOARs II, as it is a very focused way to broaden and build both new and old ideas in a small group setting in a short period of time.

Generativity



Appreciative Inquiry is more about generativity than positivity (Bushe, 2007). AI does not magically transform poor, unsupportive leadership. Just asking positive questions doesn't produce transformational change. It needs to be generative: what can we do with this to continue it or make it even better? Focusing on the positive is important for several reasons: it can support generativity (and hope), can support change in general, and it can help facilitate a positive culture change. "A focus on the positive is useful for appreciative inquiry but it's not the purpose. The purpose is to generate a new and better future" (Bushe, 2007, p. 4). A focus on generativity should be part of each process in AI: questions, conversations, and action. Generative questions have four qualities: surprising, touch the heart, contributing to relationship building, and opening a new perspective and reality. (Bushe, 2007). According to Bushe, "let's try to be thoughtful in how we make a space for inquiry into hurt, anger, injustice, despair – doing that in a way that contributes to the group's ability to understand, and bring into being, it's collective aspirations (2007. p. 5). The quality of the leadership is the most important predictor of AI success in a study of 30 schools (Bushe, 2007). Generative action means allowing improvisation to occur, allowing freedom to act on ideas, creating commitment pieces so people have something concrete to do right away, and supporting and extending already existing good ideas (Bushe, 2007).

Generativity will be particularly important in MPS SOARs II, as the new staffs of each building will be coming together for the first official time. They will be building/reinforcing a staff culture with a blend of old and new ideas. Generative action will be particularly important as the staff needs to feel their contributions are appreciated to create this positive energy and enthusiasm.

Anticipatory Reality

Anticipatory reality is an important concept in AI (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). Extensive research in a variety of areas including findings on the placebo effect, Pygmalion effect, and athlete improvement and visualization show that what we think about significantly affects what we do. Our anticipatory reality is important because it is likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy – what we see is what we will get. To that end, rather than focus on deficit – which would lead down a negative road, AI focuses on generativity and possibility – which leads toward vision, creativity, and productive communication.

Anticipatory reality was clearly recognized in MPS SOARs, but with reservation. In many of the schools, there was concern that while being optimistic and visionary is all well and good, it doesn't matter if the higher administration doesn't support the staff and their efforts. Overall, there was a real and sincere hope that this process can create positive change in the district, mainly in the areas of support and communication.

Making Meaning in Teams

Research shows that how to help teams make meaning differs whether the team is newly formed or existing (Bushe, 2002). Bushe uses the terms pre-identity for the former and post-identity for the latter to categorize the different groups. For pre-identity groups, the focus is more on the individual and how he/she may fit into the new team. In contrast, post-identity groups tend to focus more on what the group can accomplish in the future.

This contrast was distinct between Cook School (closing – moving into pre-identity) and Adams School (remaining open and largely intact in terms of staff – already in post-identity). Cook was more concerned with personal and interpersonal issues, where Adams was focused more on how to be better educators in terms of teaching. Additionally, “ending” dynamics would



be important to recognize as well (Bushe, 2002), as the closing schools were experiencing both a lost of a post-identity group and the future formation of a new group and group identity.

Evaluation of Appreciative Inquiry

Few experiments have been done to evaluate the effectiveness of AI (van der Harr, & Hosking, 2004) because of the nature of the intervention. AI is based on social construction of reality. Social construction of reality means that each participant can have and continue to hold their own views and that this reality is formed through language, conversations, and generated by social interaction (Barrett, 2006). This would necessarily make a placebo controlled pre-post experiment with Appreciative Inquiry very difficult to carry out because each individual creates their own reality. While 3 researchers have done so, (van der Harr, & Hosking, 2004), even one of them stated that it seemed contrary to the essence of Appreciative Inquiry as an ongoing process, similar to jazz improvisation (Barrett, 2010). Van der Harr and Hosking (2004) argue that in order to truly understand the effectiveness of AI as an intervention, one must understand the particular culture using it. Additionally, they explain that qualitative measures would more accurately reflect success than any quantitative one would. For this reason, evaluation of MPS SOARs took place through a questionnaire and unsolicited feedback (Appendix A). Analyzed appropriately, this qualitative and quantitative feedback can be used to assess the effectiveness of the modified AI intervention.

MPS SOARs

Based on all of the above research, Appreciative Inquiry (in a modified form) was the chosen mode of intervention. Due to time constraints and the goal of the intervention, a short session was planned to end the 2009-2010 school year and another to springboard the 2010-2011 school year. The goal of MPS SOARs I was to end this school year with an attitude of hope, appreciate

strengths, and to look optimistically toward the possibilities of next year. The goal of MPS SOARs II is to start the process of team building and goal setting for a common vision of the school.

MPS SOARs Timeline of Events

February 4, 2010 – The idea was born (see introduction).

February 5-7, 2010 (on-site 2) Debbie Swick and I brainstormed the possibilities (on or off site for the summit, length, purpose). Susan Wood's lecture resonated with me. "It's not the same Midland Public Schools anymore." I have heard this from teachers, school board members, administrators, parents, our superintendent, and our union president. The negative tone behind this statement reminds me of Susan Wood's presentation about how a hospital changed their typical tongue-in-cheek "That's the UK Way" into a saying that represented the pride they felt in their organization (2010). Appreciative Inquiry (AI) helped that hospital to change its way of thinking and I realized it has the power to work for Midland Public Schools (MPS) as well. Additionally, Wood also gave me the lead to Jackie Stavros, professor and AI facilitator specializing in education in Michigan and Marge Schiller, founder of Positive Change Core, which focuses on AI in education nationwide.

February, 20, 2010 (on-site 3) Ron Fry and I met to discuss the possibility and appropriateness of using AI in this situation. We developed the idea of a two part summit: one in the spring to provide closure to the 2009-2010 school year and to promote optimism toward the next school year and a second summit at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year to jump start the process of building group morale with the new staffs in each building. The questions in the first



summit were designed to celebrate the past, appreciate strengths, and envision a strong and healthy future.

March 3, 2010 – I emailed Gary Verlinde, MPS Director of Human Resources, to ask for a meeting (Appendix B).

March 5, 2010 - Jackie Stavros is a professor with a focus on AI and education (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009). A phone conversation was helpful in understanding the SOAR framework, obtaining permission to use the acronym, brainstorming barriers and logistics, etc. (Appendix C).

February and March 2010 A PowerPoint was developed to both introduce the program to elementary principals, but more importantly, the research behind it (Appendix D).

March 11, 2010 The PowerPoint was presented to Gary Verlinde, MPS Director of Human Resources. He liked the idea overall, but thought it would be too much to do with all buildings and that perhaps one or two principals might be interested. He felt that it should be up to the principals, not a mandate from him. He asked to receive an electronic copy of the PowerPoint so that he could show John Blahunka, MPS Director of Administrative Services.

March 16, 2010 John Blahunka oversees the principals in the district and meets with them regularly. After speaking with Gary and viewing the PowerPoint, he invited me to an elementary principals' meeting on Wednesday, April 7, 2010.

April 7, 2010 At the principals' meeting I spent about 20 minutes presenting the PowerPoint to elementary principals, John Blahunka, and Kathy Ellison, MPS Director of Curriculum. In the later discussion it became clear that the principals had no plan for transition and thought this would be a great way to bridge the closing of this year with the starting of next year. They all wanted to do it, so we brainstormed a few logistics and made plans for another meeting on April 22, 2010.

April 19, 2010 John Blahunka and I met to discuss beginning details for MPS SOARs, such as the agenda for the next principals' meeting, who should be recruited to facilitate, and the possibility of providing refreshments to the staff members during the summits.

April 22, 2010 At the principals' meeting several issues were discussed, including how to introduce the day, location in each building, who should be invited, and facilitator ideas. After discussion, we decided that the meetings would all happen in each individual elementary building. This would be more relevant to the goal of MPS SOARs as an effective way to provide closure in the setting they were accustomed to. Future SOARs may be in a different location depending of the goals of the meetings (Appendix E).

April 23-25, 2010 (On Site 5) Ron and I finalized plans and ideas. We discussed the grouping of people (have principals create the tables, then let participants pick interview partner) and wording of questions (past, present, future – draw out strengths).

April 27, 2010 An email was sent to principals explaining the program and my role in the development of it (per request of principals, then forwarded to teachers) (Appendix F).

May 5, 2010 A one hour training for facilitators was conducted: first with principals and facilitators (for introductions – MAPP facilitators introduced through PowerPoint bios) and then with facilitators only (Appendix G). The facilitators were introduced both to the situation at MPS and to the MPS SOARs program. After a question/answer period, facilitators in the first training participated in mini-interviews, table sharing, and whole group sharing of responses (basically a mini-MPS SOARs). Each facilitator was given a facilitator packet (Appendix H) and asked to email with any questions.



May 7, 2010 In a meeting with John, the main topics were a resistance letter and a location for breakfast and luncheon. A letter was sent to the MEA Union President from an elementary school (my own children's school, incidentally). The teachers questioned the need for MPS SOARs and respectfully expressed their disagreement with a "feel good" program. John advised me to put myself and my "best team" at that school. I chose Wally Mayton (local minister and a warm, welcoming face for many people), Jan Stanley (comfortable facilitating workshops with groups of adults) and Amy Walker (an elementary teacher). (epilogue: Cook was a great school to facilitate – complete range of emotions and thoughtful discussions. Later I received several appreciative emails and a thank you gift from the staff.). John reserved the MPS Post-Secondary Special Education room at the local Midland Community Center for the breakfast and luncheon.

May 14, 2010 Participant lists were due from elementary principals (Appendix I). Principals were first asked to partner each of their staff members up in a "maximum mix", meaning to try to make the partners as diverse as possible in terms of grade level, friendship, age, etc. After a discussion with Ron Fry (personal communication, April 24, 2010), he suggested that participants be only put in maximum mix groups and be allowed to choose their own interview partners. In his experience, participants seem to appreciate some degree of choice, even if it is limited. Principals were asked to create maximum mix groups of 4 or 6 people (one group of 5 was allowed if necessary). Most schools stayed the same, but there were four schools that had small changes in the participant list during the week before MPS SOARs.

May, 15, 2010 The list of facilitators was finalized (Appendix M). When all of the principals agreed to host an MPS SOARs session in their individual schools, it became clear that facilitation would be an issue. Principal felt it would be more effective if they were NOT the facilitators of their own buildings, yet I couldn't be everywhere at once. I put out a plea for help

to my MAPP5 classmates, emphasizing that travel arrangements would be on their own, but once in Midland I would take care of room and board. I also discussed the issue with a friend of mine, who happens to be an elementary teacher, and he came up with the idea of using retirees as volunteers. He listed several that he knew of that would be good. In later discussions with John Blahunka, he wondered if we could use some community volunteers. Kathy Ellison is on the board of Big Brothers/ Big Sisters and he is on the board of Child and Family Services. We ended up getting commitment from eight MAPP classmates, four BB/BS volunteers, one volunteer from CFS, one laid off teacher (one of the mid year layoffs discussed above), and six school district retirees (Appendix M).

May 2010 Materials were developed based in part from conversations with people, sources on www.appreciativeinquirycommons.org and from alignment with the goals of the morning (Appendices J, K, and L). Materials were prepared with the help of Irene Podkozin, a Dow High School student. Finally, an introductory video was filmed and produced by Kiera Ryon and Kyle Crosson, two Dow High School video communication students. The principals suggested using a video to give a uniform introduction to each session instead of leaving up to the interpretation of each individual principal and set of facilitators. The message would need to not only introduce myself, but also the intent of the program and a brief overview of how the session would work (Appendix N). In order to make the video more interesting, the video also incorporated short vignettes of high school juniors and seniors talking about their favorite elementary teacher and why that teacher made an impact on them.

May 21, 2010 An email was sent out to facilitators with last minute instructions (Appendix O).

May 24, 2010 The team schedule was developed (Appendix P).



May 26, 2010 Visuals were created. At MAPP commencement weekend, Gretchen Pisano (MAPP 5, owner and founder of Sounding Board Ink) and I had a conversation about the upcoming MPS SOARs event (personal communication, May 15, 2010). She offered some valuable advice that I was able to incorporate into the model. Based on her work facilitating meetings around the country and world, she recommended having opening and closing circles with the participants verbally stating something as a way of introduction at the beginning and commitment at the end. She argued that this would physically get the participants invested in the process instead of participating only from their seats. With a strong background in graphic facilitation, Gretchen also suggested making the participants' words and ideas as visual as possible. She suggested that participants write their final ideas on a card of some sort and signing their names as a commitment piece. She also suggested the idea of a bird soaring, perhaps with each school getting a piece of the bird with which to post their ideas.

My student service worker drew and cut out 12 clouds for facilitators to use at the beginning of the sessions to record the participants' hopes for MPS (Appendix Q). During the group sharing of information, three large pieces of paper were used to record the shared answers (Appendix R). An H. H. Dow High School art teacher, Carol Lewin, drew the bird which was then divided up into 12 pieces (one for each school). After the event some of my students finalized the outline of the bird and put the final product back together after the sessions (Appendix S).

May 27, 2010 Three members of MAPP 5 flew in to help facilitate, the other four drove. I provided airport transportation for the three that flew in, and put up six of the facilitators in my home. The seventh chose to stay at a hotel in order to have some quiet time to work on her capstone. Transportation to and from the Midland Community Center was provided by a Ford

Expedition that seats 9 and transportation to the school sites occurred through carpooling with local facilitators. When all of the out of town MAPP facilitator had arrived, I conducted a one hour meeting to go over logistics of the sessions (brainstorm ideas and modifications – dividing up the jobs among facilitators, emailing the participant survey instead).

May 28, 2010 MPS SOARs!

7:00-8:00 a.m. – At the breakfast the facilitators were welcomed by John Blahunka, Kathy Ellison, and Carl Ellinger, MPS Superintendent. All facilitators gave a brief introduction after breakfast. I gave an overview of the morning and teams met for approximately ten minutes to plan their division of duties and gather their materials for both schools (Appendix L).

8:30-10:00 a.m. – Teams facilitated the first six schools according to the team schedule (Appendix P) and MPS SOARs schedule (Table 1). After participants picked up their name tags (color coded by table), they got in a circle and shared their hopes for MPS: If everything else changes, the one thing I want to stay the same for MPS is...”. This also served as a way to introduce participants and facilitators. Their hopes were recorded on a cloud (Appendix Q). Next the video was shown giving a brief overview of the purpose of MPS SOARs (Appendix N). Participants then were introduced to and performed the paired interviews using the participant guide (Appendix K). After the interviews, the participants shared their answers at their tables following the group note guide (Appendix K). These answers were shared with the group and recorded on three sheets (one for each interview question) (Appendix R). Finally, participants again got in a circle and verbally stated how they will help MPS to soar. They recorded their names and answers on a sticker which was placed on a piece of a bird that was later assembled (Appendix S). Participants were thanked for their involvement and the meeting adjourned.



Table 1

MPS SOARs schedule

Time (90min)	Activity	Facilitator Role	Supplies
Before	SET-UP	Set up tables with color cards, hand out nametags, greet participants, ask them to sit with their color	Nametags, colors for tables
5	INTRODUCTION	Show video, introduce yourselves (name and short info), introduce principal	Projector with DVD player/computer
10	INTRODUCE INTERVIEWS	Hand out participant packet, Explain process (briefly), read each question and give them a minute or two to jot responses, ask them to choose a partner (someone at the table they don't know as well as others)	Facilitator guide, participant packets, pens
20	INTERVIEWS	Wander/Monitor, Set up for next phase On tables: group note sheet On wall: white paper (need tape and markers)	Group note sheet, pens, white paper, markers
5	REGROUP	Explain next part of the process, give instructions to follow the group note sheet	“
15	PROCESS QUESTION 1	Monitor: 10 minutes at table, 5 to share with the whole group (ask each table for their ideas)	“
15	PROCESS QUESTION 2	Monitor: 10 minutes at table, 5 to share with the whole group (ask each table for their ideas)	“
15	PROCESS QUESTION 3	Monitor: 10 minutes at table, 5 to share with the whole group (ask each table for their ideas)	“
5	CLOSING	Read closing statement, administer evaluation form and collect	Evaluation form
After	CLEAN-UP	Collect materials (give group note sheet and white paper to principals) bring rest to luncheon	materials to save, evaluations

10:00-10:30 Teams travelled to the second school.

10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. – Teams facilitated the second six schools following the same schedule (Table 1).

12:15-1:15 p.m. – Teams met back at the Midland Community Center to enjoy a thank you luncheon. John Blahunka led a debriefing of each facilitator's experience.

June 1-7, 2010 The participant survey was opened on Google docs (Appendix A). A link to Google docs was emailed to principals with a note to forward to participants. In the original training on May 5, a paper copy of an evaluation was shown to facilitators. At the May 27th training, we decided to electronically administer the survey, but two of the schools chose to use the paper version (Appendix A). These were sent to me by the principals through our inner-school mail system.

June 1-29, 2010 I spent several days organizing the information into a usable format for analysis with typing assistance from several Dow High School students. This information was forwarded to the principals to be used at their discretion (Appendix T). We also worked together to finalize the bird visual by gluing down the stickers, laminating the pieces, and mounting them onto a large piece of paper (Appendix S). I later dropped off the finished product to the Administration Center. Gary Verlinde, Director of Human Resources, accepted the bird and said the administrative team would plan to discuss it at their next meeting the following week.

June 21, 2010 I received a gift from Cook School (the school John had concerns about). They sent me a book called *Soaring* (Perry, 1997), which incidentally is about flying. The book contained the following inscription: "Thanks for helping us to 'SOAR'! It was fun and did lift our spirits. Your friends at Cook! ☺".



July and August 2010 – John Blahunka resigned from MPS and accepted a position in another district. His replacement, Jeff Hall, the elementary principals and I will be planning for MPS SOARs II in August. The goal of this second phase is to both incorporate what was learned from the first phase in May as well as to begin the process of building group morale and setting school improvement goals. The intention is to begin the first teacher workday with MPS SOARs II.

MPS SOARs evaluations, processing of information, and future planning

Anecdotal Feedback

Overall feedback from elementary teachers through personal communication and administration feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. In the weeks following the implementation of MPS SOARS, I received several emails from teachers (Appendix U), with one teacher copying me in an email to argue to the MPS Superintendent that this shouldn't be only two parts, it should continue on in several more parts as a way to reenergize our district. Additionally, Cook School sent me a book called *Soaring* with a thank you note inscribed in the front cover. On June 14, 2010, Superintendent Carl Ellinger and Director of Administration John Blahunka spoke favorably about MPS SOARS (<http://www.mps.k12.mi.us/board-of-education#recent-meetings>, video from June 14, 2010, time: 7:45-13:00).

Participant Survey

A total of 70 participants filled out a survey either online or on paper. Blank copies of the surveys can be found in Appendix A and full results of the survey can be viewed in Appendix V. Of the total number of respondents, 76% enjoyed MPS SOARs, 17% were neutral, and 7 % disliked the program. Of the dissatisfied respondents, several would rather have been packing their classrooms- which is not necessarily a negative comment toward MPS SOARs, rather a function of time pressure. The remaining statistics are only counting agree or strongly agree as

positive responses (4 and 5 on the likert scale). Ninety six percent of online respondents felt confident that they can make positive contributions to MPS (one was neutral and one did not respond). One of the main goals for MPS SOARs was to give participants an opportunity to reflect back on their positive experiences in the school district. Overall, 73% of respondents enjoyed this chance to reflect, but enjoyed even more hearing other people's stories of reflection (77%). Feeling valued for their contributions was another focus of the interview questions. Sixty two percent of respondents enjoyed the opportunity to feel valued and 73% appreciated hearing their colleagues feeling valued. The final interview question looked optimistically to the future. Sixty seven percent of the respondents enjoyed that for themselves and 73% enjoyed hearing the ideas of their colleagues.

Regarding what should be done with the information, comments were widely varied. Most felt the information should be shared with the central administration of the school district (Superintendent and School Board). Others felt it would be interesting for them personally to analyze. Some thought it would be helpful to analyze at the beginning of the next school year as a staff. Several felt that the value was already there – in the sharing itself, and that nothing more needed to be done with the information. Based on these comments, the information was shared with the principals for their building only to be used at their discretion in June. A hard copy of each school's information and the final poster of the bird (Appendix S) was shared with Carl Ellison, MPS Superintendent. Overall data trends and information (Appendix W) will be used in the planning of MPS SOARs II in August. During that planning it will be determined if anything further should be done with the information.

Data Trends



All of the facilitator teams were asked to bring the posters (cloud, themes from interview questions, and piece of bird) to the Community Center. That data was then typed into a document created by one of the facilitators, Amy Walker (Appendix T). As I expected, there were many similarities across all 12 buildings. Interestingly, verbalized answers to questions did not differ significantly whether the school was closing or remaining open. Due to the great deal of movement of the teaching staff (either forced through the school closing, voluntary transfers, involuntary bumping, or retirees), it appeared that all of the schools recognized a need for both closure and establishing a new team atmosphere.

Related to the opening question asked of the participants, “If everything else changes, the one thing I want to stay the same for MPS is...”, several main trends were seen. The top stated hope dealt with keeping strong staff camaraderie. This makes sense when considering the group morale research (Peterson, Park, & Sweeney, 2008) as well as the literal splitting up of many of the school staff members. Achieving the group stage of norming (Tuckman, 1965) was a priority of many. Putting kids first, delivering a quality education, and maintaining a united community (teachers, other staff, kids, parents, general community) were other strong hopes for many staff members. At Cook School several teachers talked about putting the “garbage” and turmoil of the past year behind them and moving on. Being a part of a positive staff culture was another clear priority for many. Words like passion, success, openness, value, humor, welcoming, and support were other shared hopes that directly relate to positive staff culture. Logistically, others verbalized hopes directly related to the operating of the school: no more cuts, maintenance of benefits, commitment to support elective programs (second language, music, art, etc), and support of opportunities for students and staff (activities and professional development, respectively).

Next the data was analyzed from the first interview question (Appendix K), describing both a high point in their time at school. The majority of these answers related directly to the hopes that were shared in the beginning. Seligman's four pillars of positive psychology (2009) were clearly shown in answers to the high point question. People remembered positive emotions, relationships, achievement (mainly by students), and meaning (most often described in the small moments of student accomplishment). Watching participants interview each other was like watching a roller coaster of positive emotions. Some stories brought forth hearty laughter, other stories truly touched the heart.

The second interview question related to a time when they felt valued for their contributions (Appendix K). Some of the stories were about public recognition (an award, a story in the paper, end of the year gifts), but interestingly, most were about the small moments of appreciation (a thank you from a difficult child, a random note or phone call, an unsolicited compliment from a principal). Other stories dealt with indirectly feeling valued. Having parents volunteer in the classroom, collaborating with other teachers, being asked to give advice to a colleague, all of these examples show a respect for the teachers that can be deeply satisfying. Other teachers commented that giving of compliments and support to each other helped them to personally feel valued. As one teacher said, "feeling part of a larger something...and that your individual part in that is valued". While at first a seemingly awkward question, "You want us to brag?", it soon became much deeper once the conversations started.

The final interview question related to their imagining a perfect transition in the fall (Appendix K). This question related directly to the hopes shared at the beginning of the day, although the atmosphere was different. While the hopes could certainly be lofty (no more cuts),



these ideal future answers were more grounded in the positive reality of what next fall can look like in the elementary buildings. Again, staff camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration were at the top of the list. Some talked about the opening days of school being welcoming to all, others simply want their materials to be moved in one piece. Many staff believed a positive attitude would be the key to an ideal transition. Again, related ideas like passion, humor, respect, energy, zest, purpose, choices, and hope were stated in support of the idea of keeping a positive attitude. These also are qualities of effective teachers (Seligman, 2009) and basic components of group morale (Peterson, Park, & Sweeney, 2008). The final statements made by staff members of each building (For MPS to SOAR, I will...) clearly demonstrated their commitment to making the future for MPS as ideal as possible.

Facilitator Appreciation

Facilitators were thanked through a personal note from John Blahunka and publically at the June 14, 2010 board meeting (<http://www.mps.k12.mi.us/board-of-education#recent-meetings>, time: 7:45-13:00).

Pictures

Pictures of the events were taken and shared both to building principals through email and to facilitators both through email and on Snapfish. Examples can be found in Appendix X.

Planning for MPS SOARs II

The planning for MPS SOARs II will take place in August with Jeff Hall, the new MPS Director of Administration, and the seven elementary principals. The goal of MPS SOARs II is to start the team building process and to bring out ideas/programs/initiatives that staff members are interested in beginning or continuing. The data trends from MPS SOARs

(Appendix W) can be used in various ways, either as a springboard for discussion, as visuals, as part of a video, etc. Several of the May facilitators have offered their volunteer services again as well as a 2010 retiree. With different goals for MPS SOARS II (oriented more toward group morale and the design and destiny phases of AI), it may be possible to also utilize the principals more in the facilitation process. Several timeline options which need to be considered: first day of school with 30 minutes in individual buildings, 1 ½ hour in larger site with everyone, additional phases further into the year, etc. This may vary by building or be uniform throughout the district.

Conclusion

While “it is what it is” as my husband often says, there is no doubt that change can be difficult. It can produce a wide range of negative emotions and limit the potential of individuals and groups. Interestingly, change can also be embraced, producing upward spirals of emotions that create new and wonderful opportunities never before imagined. When the principals of Midland Public Schools embraced the idea of MPS SOARs, they verbalized their fear of the former and were clearly looking for the latter. With their support, the help of the facilitators, and the research backing, MPS did soar on May 28th. As one teacher said, “Though many of us were not looking forward to spending our time this way, it turned out to be very positive and helpful. It lifted our spirits and helped us to feel valued and to value others. So many good ideas were shared. Thank you for your efforts - your caring, and for doing something to benefit all of us. Much concern has been shown for children and parents. It was nice to know we are also important in this process.” That statement alone is enough for me to be satisfied with what MPS SOARs accomplished.



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Appendix A

MPS SOARs Participant Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in Part 1 of MPS SOARs. The goal of the day was to help to facilitate the elementary transition through recognizing strengths, allowing time to share opportunities and aspirations, and giving space to reflect on positive past experiences. Please fill out this survey to help us assess the success of these goals. It should only take a few minutes. Please try to have it completed by Monday, June 7. Thank you very much!

I am a: (teacher, principal, custodian, office professional, etc.)

Answer the following questions on a scale of 1-5 (1 strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree).

1. I enjoyed MPS SOARs.
2. The program was organized.
3. The opening activity (HOPES) was effective.
4. The video was a helpful introduction.
5. I enjoyed the paired interview.
6. I enjoyed the group activity of summarizing the interviews (themes).
7. The closing sticker activity (For MPS to soar, I will...) was an effective way to close the day.
8. I appreciated the chance to reflect on positive past experiences in MPS.
9. I enjoyed hearing other people reflect on their positive past experiences.
10. I appreciated the chance to reflect on times when I felt valued for my contributions.
11. I enjoyed hearing other people reflect on times when they felt valued for their contributions.
12. I appreciated the chance to imagine a smooth transition in the fall.
13. I enjoyed hearing other people's ideas for what would make for a smooth transition in the fall.
14. I feel confident that I can make a positive contribution to MPS.
15. I feel that MPS SOARs fostered optimism.
16. I feel that important ideas were shared in MPS SOARs.
17. Many great things were shared on Friday. What should be done with that information?
18. Our facilitators were effective.
19. In the fall, the facilitators should be (as much as possible)
 - ☐ same combination as this time (retiree, local, and out of town volunteers)
 - ☐ retirees
 - ☐ local community members
 - ☐ volunteers from outside our community
 - ☐ Other:
20. Planning will take place this summer for the second part of MPS SOARs. If you or someone you know might be interested in serving on a planning committee, please list those names below:
21. The timing of MPS SOARs (part 1) was effective (at the end of the year).
22. The time spent on MPS SOARs (1 1/2 hours) was
 - ☐ too much time
 - ☐ just right

- ☐ not enough time
- 23. If you could describe in one word your feelings about MPS SOARs so far, it would be...
- 24. Please use the space below to make any comments about MPS SOARs (feedback, questions, concerns, etc.) You may feel free to address any of the above questions as needed.
- 25. Please feel free to share any ideas you have to help in planning MPS SOARs 2 in the fall!

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Appendix B**Email to Gary Verlinde (March 3, 2010)**

Sent Items

Wednesday, March 03, 2010 3:49 PM

To: [Verlinde, Gary H.](#); [Blahunka, John A.](#)

Cc: [Ellinger, Carl R.](#)

Dear John and Gary,

I know that you are faced with the enormous task of closing five elementary schools, staffing the remaining seven, and a huge variety of other tasks associated with this process. I would like to offer assistance in helping to facilitate positive endings, transitions, and beginnings for the elementary staff in the district.

As part of my course work in the MAPP program at UPenn, I am in the process of developing a program called MPS SOARs (strength, opportunity, aspiration, and results). It will be designed to specifically meet the unique needs presented to MPS teaching staff as the district goes forward with the school closings and reorganizations.

I would like to meet with you about this program. I can make myself available most any time that works for you. It is also my understanding that Jim Huber and Tracy Renfro are playing a large role in facilitating these transitions. If you would prefer that I contact them directly, I would be happy to do so. I look forward to hearing from you!

Regards,

Kathy

Appendix C

Jackie Stavros interview notes (March 5, 2010)

1. Framework: share and ask for comments

Maximum mix of tables

Unconditional positive questions

AI is an operating platform

2. SOAR – can I use it?

Yes!

Email her – she'll send me a copy of *Thin Book of SOAR* (10 years of her work)

5I approach – Inquiry, imagination, innovation, inspiration...?

Healthy dialogue with SOAR

3. Funding

Professional development funds, Community sponsors

4. How to sell it?

Change mindset...honor students

Transition together, focus on what's right

Move the system forward, for the kids

5. Mandatory vs. voluntary

Utah school system started mandatory, then big even – voluntary (big turnout)

MECF – moving every child forward

Connecticut – voluntary

6. Pre-work

Hardest work



80% design 20% summit

7. CEU – possibility if not mandated?

Yes, need to submit hours and agenda

8. How to sustain the momentum

Parents, kids

Results – commitment cards (what inspired you? What will you do? 2 or 3 things to realize SOAR)

Navy clips – 1. Inspired, 2. 3 actions, 3. Resources you need, 4. Rewards you hope to see

9. Goal

Dewitt Jones example – celebrate what's right in this world, focus your vision of how to move forward

Cadillac plant 2005 – lot of resistance, worked through it, plan didn't shut down as planned

10. Biggest challenges

Tone is key (facilitator – positive)

We can't? Well then, what can we do?

Ticking time bombs – honor their words and keep them moving forward OR go ahead and leave!

Get one person to buy in, they'll convince another, etc. ☺

11. Tips?

Flip chart

Vision walk – dots (each gets 3) which ones resonate the most with you?

Creative thinking partner

Appendix D

PowerPoint for Principals' meeting (outline of slides)

1. MPS SOARs
 - Facilitating the elementary staff transition in a positive and productive way
2. The Challenge
 - Mental challenges of a changing work environment
 - Effective teaching while facing the anxiety of the unknown
 - Effective teaching while dealing with loss
 - Effective teaching while adjusting to a new work environment
 - Types of possible changes: school, grade, classroom, team-teaching, colleagues, principal
 - OVERALL: How to best create new positive and productive work environments as effectively and efficiently as possible?
3. The Goal
 - Build positive work environments that will benefit students, teachers, administrators, and the community using empirically-based methods
 - Specific interventions designed to:
 - End this school year with an attitude of hope
 - Begin the next school year by building positive group morale within each elementary building
 - Assist building administrators in formulating school improvement goals for the new school environments
 - Continue to provide exemplary education to our students
4. Proposal
 - MPS SOARs (model can be adjusted to best meet the needs of the school/staff)
 - May 28 PD (or April 19?) – 45 minutes to begin the process of SOARs through paired teacher interviews (following a provided question guide), 5 minute introduction, 15 minutes per person, 10 minute wrap up
 - Summer – work to sort, review, consolidate, analyze interviews and plan for day 2
 - September 1 (or first teacher work day) – 2-3 hour building summit to initiate positive staff culture and school vision
 - Future PDs – build on ideas from September meeting
5. The Rationale (empirical background)
 - Peak End - Research has shown that how an event ends (as well as peak experiences during) plays a significant role on the overall memory of the event.
 - Ending this school year on a positive note can help teachers feel a sense of hope and optimism toward next year as well as to honor positive memories of the past.
 - Group Morale -Many factors contribute to the development of positive group morale. (purpose, optimism, self-efficacy, role clarity, participative decision-making,



opportunities)

-MPS SOARs can begin the process of building a cohesive staff by focusing on major components of group morale.

Broaden and Build Considerable research has shown that the fostering of positive emotions can both broaden scopes of thinking and build ideas, productivity, and work satisfaction.

-MPS SOARs is designed to focus on strengths and positive emotions (rather than a deficit model, which tends to narrow vision and hinder positive emotions).

Hope Theory

hope finding – recognizing hopes of staff

hope bonding – articulating those hopes to a vision of a vibrant school culture

hope enhancing – plans to bring those visions to life

hope reminding – school improvement process

Strengths Recognizing the strengths of individuals and organizations helps to focus on what is right rather than dwelling on what is wrong.

Also focusing on strengths leads to engagement and hope which lead to increased effort and productivity which increases student success

-MPS SOARs is designed to bring out the strengths in the teaching staff and fuse those strengths into a positive and productive school culture.

Work Orientation Workers who see their work as a calling rather than just a job tend to perform better, show more commitment, less conflict, better relationships with management.

-MPS SOARs is designed to bring teachers back to the positive core of why they chose this profession.

Student Benefits Highly engaged and effective teachers tend to exhibit characteristics of zest, perseverance, social intelligence, and humor.

-By building positive and productive work environments, these qualities, which exemplify many MPS teachers, will be able to help the MPS vision come true.

6. MPS Vision

“We are agile and flexible so that we are able to adapt to new challenges and opportunities in this rapidly changing world.”

(taken from MPS “draft” vision statement, 2010)

7. Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an organizational development process that engages individuals within an organizational system in renewal, change and focused performance. It uses a 4D cycle of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. Transformative change. SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) is a specific approach to the application of AI. It focuses on a 5I approach of initiate, inquire, imagine, innovate, and inspire to implement.

Both utilize a combination of paired appreciative interviews, small group, and large group discussions during the course of the summit which varies in length from several hours to several days. It can be done as one event or a series of meetings over a designated period of time.

8. AI Examples

Major Corporations

Blue Cross/Blue Shield, McDonalds, Roadway, Verizon

Government Organizations

U.S. Navy, Smithsonian Gardens

Health Care Institutions

Children's Hospital of Pennsylvania, Cleveland Clinic

Higher Education Institutions

Case Western, UC-Berkley, U-Minnesota, U-Wisconsin

School Systems

Chicago, Cleveland, Camden Catholic Central,

Fairview Elementary (similar situation as MPS)

Spiritual and Social Service Organizations

United Religions Initiative, American Red Cross, UNICEF, United Way, Nepal
(trains AI practitioners in remote villages)

9. MPS SOARS Process

Using a modified Appreciative Inquiry model and SOAR model

Begins with structured paired interviews (pairs interview each other with a developed interview guide) at the end of May*.

From the interviews (over the summer), stories and patterns are noted emphasizing strengths and ideas. Shared through posters, booklet, emails, etc.

1st staff meeting in September

shorter interviews to start,

Small group discussion of patterns discovered from summer work on May interviews

Strengths are drawn out and visions are shared to the larger group.

The shared vision and strengths of the staff are used to initiate positive group morale, bring out ideas, and focus the staff for the school year.

(*modification possibilities: April 19, summer interviews, longer interviews to start September meeting)

Sample Interview Questions

Overall the interviews address the best of the past, present, and possible future.

[http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/Barrington%20Summit%20-](http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/Barrington%20Summit%20Participant%20Packet.doc)[Participant%20Packet.doc](http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/Barrington%20Summit%20Participant%20Packet.doc)[http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/5.%20%20Morton%20Elmentary%20-](http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/5.%20%20Morton%20Elmentary%20-%20AI%20Interview%20Protocols.doc)
[%20AI%20Interview%20Protocols.doc](http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/5.%20%20Morton%20Elmentary%20-%20AI%20Interview%20Protocols.doc)

10. My training

Master of Applied Positive Psychology (anticipated diploma 10/10) from the University of Pennsylvania

Appreciative Inquiry training from:

David Cooperrider (Case Western)

Ron Fry (Case Western)

Frank Barrett (Harvard, Naval Post Graduate Academy)

Debbie Swick (University of Pennsylvania)

Jackie Stavros (Lawrence Technological Institute)

Empirical background training from:



Shane Lopez (Gallup Institute)
 Chris Peterson (University of Michigan)
 Martin Seligman (University of Pennsylvania)
 Barb Frederickson (UNC-Chapel Hill)
 Paul Rozin (University of Pennsylvania)
 James Pawelski (University of Pennsylvania)

11. Logistics

Approval (steps and levels necessary) – is used in other districts as a valuable part of Professional Development time (<http://dennissparks.wordpress.com/>, Dennis Sparks (National Staff Development Council)– speaker at MDE/NCA Spring School Improvement Workshop, “Culture trumps innovation”

Key: transition coordinators (Huber and Renfro) and Principals

All schools or on an individual basis?

Program design (development, feedback)

Experts/Advisors

Design team (ideally combination of key “stakeholders” - teachers and building principals)

Summer work with analyzing interviews and planning (me, design team, principals?)

Grant/Sponsor (funding needed based on scope of project)

Local businesses, service groups, etc.

Development of materials

Meet with building principals

Facilitators trained (principals, from design team, others?)

Implementation (May, summer, September)

Follow-up

12. Advisors:

Dan Bowling – Duke University Law professor (labor and employment specialist), MAPP ‘09

Jackie Stavros – Lawrence Technological Institute associate professor for the Graduate College of Management, developer of SOAR framework

Ron Fry – Case Western University professor of Organizational Behavior

Elizabeth Elizardi – Early childhood education consultant, MAPP ‘10

Jennifer Hogan – New York City Department of Education, MAPP ‘10

Kendall Petri – Director of Education for Lagniappe Academies of New Orleans (opening fall 2010), MAPP ‘10

Amy Walker – Geelong Grammar School of Australia, teacher, MAPP ‘10 assistant facilitator of AI summit for Smithsonian Gardens

Marge Schiller – Founder and Executive Director of Positive Change Core (focuses on transformative change in education)

James Pawelski – University of Pennsylvania, Director of Education in the Positive Psychology Center

Robert Rebele – Kaplan Institute, MAPP ‘10

Debbie Swick – University of Pennsylvania, Associate Director of Education in the Positive Psychology Center

Appendix E

Agenda for April 22, 2010 (principals' meeting)

Videos – how to, what should it say? – me, discuss purpose

Advertisement/How to introduce – come up with a flyer to advertise, key role for principals

Facilitators – like ideas of retirees and community members, impressed

Training on May 5 - logistics

Questions

Food from PTOs – good idea

Schedule (same for each – yes)

Participant list (need by Friday, May 14 – email as attachment – principals fill out and return)

Materials needed – I will bring it all

- butcher paper

- tape

- markers

- writing utensils

- disposable cameras (or digital?)

Other things from John?



Appendix F

Email for elementary teachers

Dear elementary staff,

My name is Kathy Snyder. I teach at Dow High School and am the mother of two wonderful children. Like others, I have searching for ways to be supportive to those around me as our district faces this difficult transition. My children go to Cook Elementary School. When my daughter Haylee, a 4th grader, first heard the news of the school closings, she burst into tears. In comforting her, I assured her that no matter where she goes in Midland Public Schools, she will always have great teachers. Through her tears, she looked at me and said, “I know that, Mom, but the teachers and everybody at Cook are going to be so sad.” Even my second grade son Cayden was worried about his teacher, while at the same time excited to make new friends. While their teachers are absolutely fabulous, never missing a beat, we have talked and I know the anxiety is there. There are so many unknowns and I realized that perhaps I had a way to help. Throughout the course of this school year, I have been pursuing a graduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania – a Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP). It probably sounds like “happy-ology”, but it isn’t. The focus of the program is to use research-validated methods to bring out the best in people at all levels- individual, group, community, and society. It is what helps people to achieve and sustain their well-being and ultimately, to flourish. By pulling together many theories and talking to countless people, I created an idea to help facilitate the elementary transition – MPS SOARs (Strength, Opportunity, Aspiration, Reflection). I have discussed my idea with your elementary principals; they liked it and here we are!

On May 28th, you will be participating in the first part of a two part summit (first with your current building, the second will be in the fall with your 2010-11 building). The facilitators will volunteers, both local volunteers and members of my MAPP program (Some are travelling quite a distance!). It will be a day to look forward to – full of celebration, reflection, and hope. While “it is what it is” (as my husband often says), there is no doubt that change is difficult. It can produce frustration, anger, fear, anxiety, and sadness. Fortunately, it can also bring out strength, opportunity, aspiration, and a chance for reflection. In short, resilience is possible and flourishing just as possible. I am very excited for May 28th when together we can SOAR. I know that may sound corny, but I certainly wouldn’t have felt so compelled to make this happen if I didn’t firmly believe that it can make a difference.

I am very grateful to your principals for embracing this idea. It is my goal and hope that you find the day productive and refreshing.

Kathy Snyder

Dow High teacher

Appendix G

Facilitator Training Agenda

Facilitator Training – Franklin Center

Wednesday, May 5, from 10-11

1. Take them through the actual process. (mini with much shorter interviews)
 - a. Interviews
 - b. Group sharing
 - c. Whole group debrief
2. Background on me and AI (powerpoint)
3. Show video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efersNm_O-E)
4. Handouts
 - a. Facilitator guide
 - b. Schedule for day (including set up and take down)
5. Give them my card for questions.
6. Introduce any MAPP facilitators (pictures?) with bio
7. Questions?
8. Thank you very much ☺

Supplies:

- Proxima
- Computer
- Nametags
- Handouts
 - Facilitator guide
 - Interview questions
 - Group processing sheet
- 3 sheets of big paper
- Markers
- Business cards
- PowerPoint with pictures of MAPP facilitators



Appendix H

Facilitator Guide

7 Steps to Successful SOARing ☺

1. **Set up** the room as much as possible before the participants arrive. You will have a box of materials.
2. **Orient** yourself with the room. (clocks, bathrooms, walls for the big paper, etc.)
3. Greet participants as they come in and help them find their nametag (you will wear one too!) Use their **names** often.
4. Follow the **schedule** as closely as possible. Keep track of time.
5. Encourage **positive** stories and comments. Try to draw out the positive core of the building and staff – what is right. (Don't be surprised if there is a nay-sayer or two. The goal is to minimize their potential negative impact. Acknowledge their concerns, but keep refocusing to the positive.)
6. **Write ideas** on the white paper. Place the paper on the walls where it is visible by most, if not all of the participants.
7. **Honor the emotions.** The goal is to bring out energy and optimism from the staff, but the reality is that we need to honor the idea of closure as well. Work to bring the discussion back to what can be appreciated and brought forward.

THANK YOU and HAVE FUN!

Appendix I

Participant List Template

Email instructions to principals

Hello!

In my discussions with Ron Fry this weekend, we have come up with a modification to the participant list I will be asking you to fill out by May 14th. He has found it most successful when people are assigned to a particular table and then allowed to choose their own interview partner from that table. It allows a combination of strategically mixing people (table assignments) and personal choice (which participants tend to appreciate). It also makes nametag making much easier! With that in mind, please assign participants to tables of 4-6 people. I have attached a spreadsheet for your use.

Thank you!

Kathy

Template

Name of Principal _____ Name of School _____

Table #	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						



Materials List

[illegible]

Appendix K

Materials: Participant Packet

MPS SOARs

**Facilitating the elementary staff transition in
a positive and productive way**

Focus on:

**Strength, Opportunity, Aspiration, and
Results (SOARs)**

May 28, 2010

Participant Guide

My thoughts for Question 1:

My thoughts for Question 2:

My thoughts for Question 3:



The Appreciative Interview

(Find a place for you and your partner to talk comfortably.)

Task: For the 20 minutes you will be sharing interviews with a person you may not know very well. You will interview your partner for 10 minutes then switch roles and your partner will interview you. Decide who wants to be interviewed first. As you listen to your interview partner, jot down words, phrases, quotes, anything that stands out for you as exciting and important. It is not necessary to take detailed notes. Just capture enough to help you recall the story so that you can share it later. **PLEASE KEEP TRACK OF TIME!**

NOTE: Appreciative Interviews differ from traditional interviews in that the questions are simply guidelines that lead the person being interviewed to delve into the most creative, exciting, life-giving experiences that they have had in their life and work. It is not as important to answer every question as it is to tell a complete story, evoking the situation complete with details of what happened and the feelings involved. The goal is to help the person doing the interviewing experience as much as possible the situation being described. The interviewer's role is to LISTEN, occasionally prompting the person being interviewed to be more descriptive or to enlarge the story.

1. Think of a time when you had a really terrific experience at this school. Tell me about this experience - what did you or your students learn and/or enjoy?
2. Schools work best when all persons are valued for their individual abilities, gifts, and learning styles. Everyone is at their personal best when they are recognized for their unique contributions to the success of their school. Please describe a time when you really felt valued and your contribution was appreciated. Describe the situation. Who was involved? What did they do to make you feel valued? How did it affect you? What can we learn from this experience?
3. It is now next fall and you are ready to start school. Imagine the best possible situation where the transition for everyone has been basically ideal. What does it look like? What are we achieving? What has been your role in helping us reach this point?

After the interview is over (Only if you have extra time!):

Please take a moment and jot down 3 strengths you saw in your partner based on their responses. Why?
(Feel free to use the attached sheet as a guide.)

1.

2.

3.

After 20 minutes for the interviews, you and your partner will go back to your original table.



Appendix K

Materials: Group Note Sheets

Group Exercise – Identifying Themes:

Each table should choose a manager to keep the group on task (use this sheet as a guide), a timekeeper, and a recorder (use “group note sheet”).

FOR EACH QUESTION (15 minutes each):

1. Spend about 5 minutes going around the table and ask each person to briefly share the story told by his/her partner FOR QUESTION 1 ONLY.
2. After hearing each other’s stories, the group should take about 5 minutes to make a brainstormed list of the themes/topics* that resonate with them from the quotes and/or stories – about high points, life-giving forces, strengths, – ideas about what is needed at an elementary school when it is functioning at its very best. From the “brainstormed” master list, agree on 3 – 5 themes that your group feels are important and that you would all like to share with the group.

(Recorders: Please take notes on the group note sheet (This will be collected as part of the process to prepare for part 2 in the fall.)

3. The facilitator(s) will lead a whole-group discussion on question 1 for about 5 minutes.

REPEAT PROCESS FOR QUESTIONS 2 AND 3 (as instructed by the facilitator)

***NOTES ON THEMES:** A topic (or theme) is a word, ideas, or concept about what is present in stories when people are reporting the times of greatest excitement, creativity and reward. For example, in many stories you may hear that a “high level of cooperation,” or “clarity about a common purpose,” or “feeling of fun and achievement,” is present when things are at their best. These phrases are “themes.” In your brainstormed list include all of these kinds of phrases or words that people can identify.

GROUP NOTE SHEET:

QUESTION 1:

Top themes for question 1:

QUESTION 2:

Top themes for question 2:

QUESTION 3:

Top themes for question 3:



Appendix K

Materials: SOARs labels

For MPS to SOAR, I will...

For MPS to SOAR, I will...

Name:

Name:

For MPS to SOAR, I will...

For MPS to SOAR, I will...

Name:

Name:

Appendix L

Materials in Box

One for each school.



Appendix M

Facilitator Information

Local volunteers

Cammie Hall – laid off high school teacher (Midland Public Schools)
Angie Karwan – employee at Big Brothers, Big Sisters
Wally Mayton – Presbyterian minister, Big Brothers, Big Sisters board member
Janine Ouderkirk – counselor at Child and Family Services
Susan Putnam - executive director of Big Brothers, Big Sisters
Michelle Waskevich – employee at Big Brothers, Big Sisters

Volunteer retirees

Marilyn Enzie – retired elementary teacher
Margie Lee – retired middle school principal
Carolann Maxwell – retired high school assistant principal
Betsy Rau – retired high school teacher
Jim Samocki – retired high school counselor
Ed Strom – retired high school teacher and department head
Ruth Sutton – retired high school counselor

MAPP volunteers (MAPP ‘10)

Tom Calkusic - Indiana
Genna Douglass -New York
Jenn Hogan – New York
Vanessa King - London
Jan Stanley - Wisconsin
Rob Rebele - Philadelphia
Amy Walker – Philadelphia (Australia)

MAPP, high school teacher and MPS SOARs developer and director – Kathy Snyder

Appendix N

Video Script

A DVD of the video can be provided by contacting the author.

Good morning. My name is Kathy Snyder. I teach at Dow High School and my children attend Cook School. Like others, I have searching for ways to be supportive to those around me as our district faces this difficult transition.

Recently I completed a Masters program in Applied Positive Psychology. It probably sounds like “happy-ology”, but it isn’t. The focus of the program is to use research-validated methods to bring out the best in people at all levels- individual, group, community, and society. It is what helps people to achieve and sustain their well-being and ultimately, to flourish. By pulling together many theories and talking to countless people, an idea was developed to help facilitate the elementary transition – MPS SOARs which stands for Strength, Opportunity, Aspiration, and Reflection.

Today you will be participating in the first part of a two day summit –today with your current building, the second will be in the fall with your 2010-11 building. Your facilitators are volunteers, both local volunteers and classmates of mine who have volunteered to come here from out of state. One even joins us from the UK! We hope this will be a day to look forward to – full of celebration, reflection, and hope.

I am not an elementary teacher, and I cannot claim to understand what you have been going through this year. As a fellow teacher in the district, however, I feel like we need a chance to talk about what we value about **our** strengths, **our** experiences, and **our** vision for the future. This is **our** district and **your** voices can make it stronger.

While “it is what it is” (as my husband often says), there is no doubt that change is difficult. It can produce frustration, anger, fear, anxiety, and sadness. Fortunately, it can also bring out strength, opportunity, aspiration, and a chance for reflection. In short, resilience is possible and flourishing just as possible. I am very grateful to your principals for embracing MPS SOARs. It is my goal and hope that you find the morning productive and refreshing.



Appendix O

Facilitator email (May 21, 2010)

Hello facilitators!

We are less than two weeks away from MPS SOARS! I am getting excited and I hope you are too! Please feel free to email me with any questions. Remember though, you are there to facilitate – they are doing the real work. Your job is simply to help it go smoothly. You really can't go wrong as long as they see you care and are interested in what they have to say!

Below is a schedule of the day:

Schedule	Activity
7:00-8:00	Breakfast Reception at the Community Center (lower level – room C120). Meet the other facilitators on your team!
8:00-8:30	travel and set-up time (Please plan to carpool with your team members – our out-of-town guests will need a lift ☺. If this is an issue, please let me know.)
8:30-10:00	facilitate the first school (Supplies will be given to you at the breakfast reception -divided for each school.)
10:00-10:30	travel time
10:30-12:00	facilitate the second school
12:15-1:15	Luncheon at the Community Center (lower level – room C120). Thank you for helping!

I have placed you in teams to facilitate the schools. Your teams and schools are listed below.

Team #	Teams	8:30-10	10:30-12
1	1. Kathy Snyder 3. Wally Mayton 2. Amy Walker 4. Jan Stanley	Cook	Adams
2	1. Jim Samocki 3. Susan Putnam 2. Jenn Hogan	Siebert	Mills
3	1. Betsy Rau 3. Michelle Waskevich 2. Genna Douglass 4. Ed Strom	Parkdale	Chestnut Hill

4	1. Margie Lee 3. Marilyn Enzie 2. Tom Calkusic	Carpenter	Woodcrest
5	1. Reb Rebele 3. Carolann Maxwell 2. Angie Karwan	Chippewassee	Woodcrest
6	1. Cammie Hall 3. Ruth Sutton 2. Vanessa King 4. Janine Ouderkirk	Eastlawn	Plymouth

I have also attached the facilitator instructions. If you would like, I can debrief more through email or at the reception breakfast on Friday morning. The seven out-of-town facilitators will be at my house on Thursday evening. You are also welcome to stop by and say hi then! (2828 N. Waskevich) I anticipate we would be gathering (some are flying and some are driving) between 8 and 11 that evening.

Please let me know if you have any questions! Thank you so much for helping,

Kathy



Appendix P

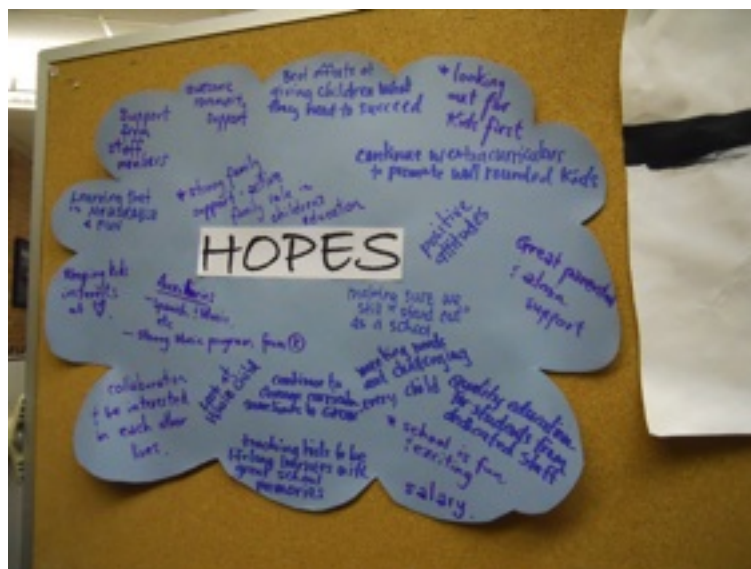
Team Schedule

Team #	Teams	8:30-10	10:30-12
1	1. Kathy Snyder 2. Amy Walker 3. Wally Mayton 4. Jan Stanley	Cook On Perrine between Saginaw and Wackerly	Adams Corner of Washington and Adams (off Jefferson or Wheeler)
2	1. Jim Samocki 2. Jenn Hogan 3. Susan Putnam	Siebert Next to Jefferson Middle School	Mills On Baker between Eastman and Jefferson
3	1. Betsy Rau 2. Genna Douglass 3. Ed Strom 4. Michelle Waskevich	Parkdale Next to Midland High	Chestnut Hill Sugnet to Chestnut Hill Drive (Between Swede and Waldo)
4	1. Margie Lee 2. Tom Calkusic 3. Marilyn Enzie	Carpenter Off of Eastman	Woodcrest Off Saginaw
5	1. Carolann Maxwell 2. Reb Rebele 3. Angie Karwan	Chippewassee M20 West – right on Smith Road	Plymouth Next to Northeast Middle School
6	1. Cammie Hall 2. Vanessa King 3. Ruth Sutton 4. Janine Ouder Kirk	Cammie and Vanessa help with Siebert Ruth and Janine help with Parkdale	Eastlawn/Longview together (at Eastlawn) Corner of Eastlawn and Jefferson (near Community Center)

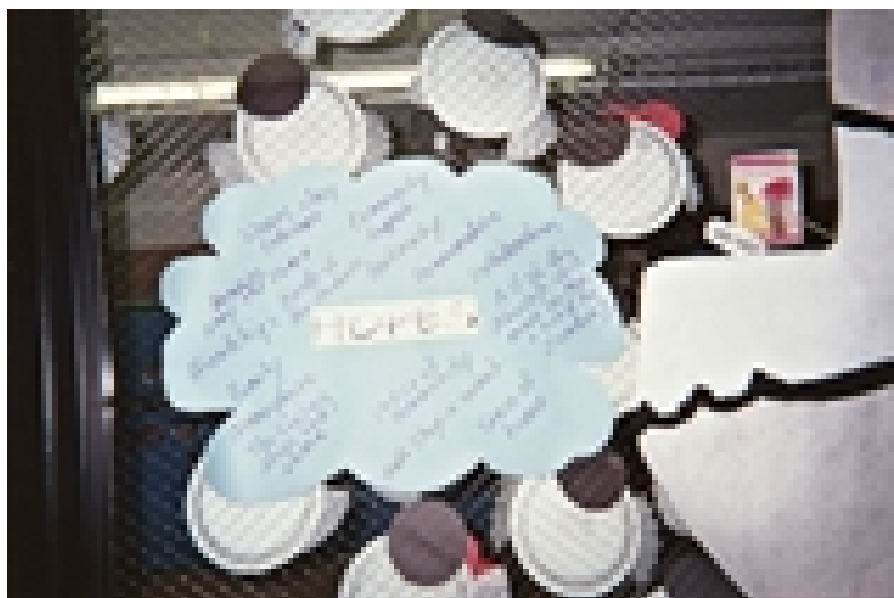
Appendix Q

Hopes

(sample from Adams)

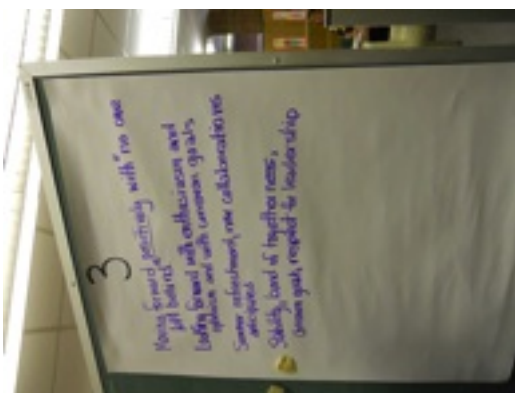
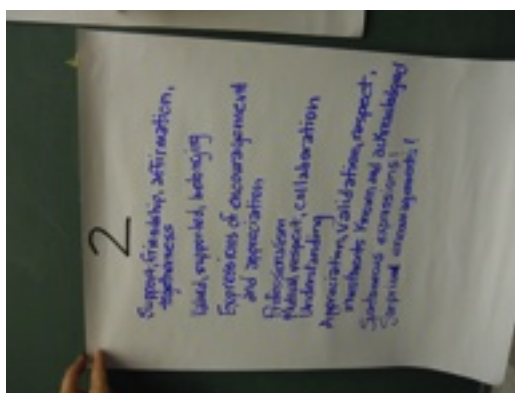
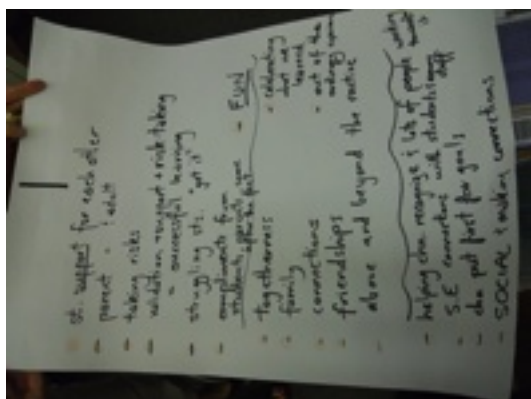


Sample from Chippewassee



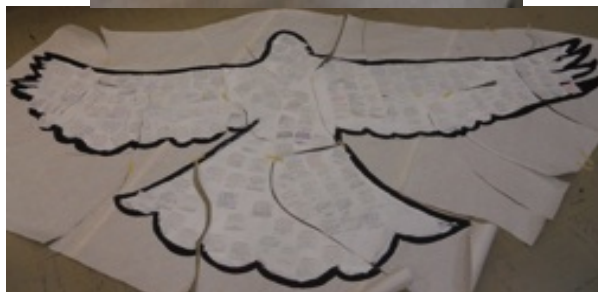
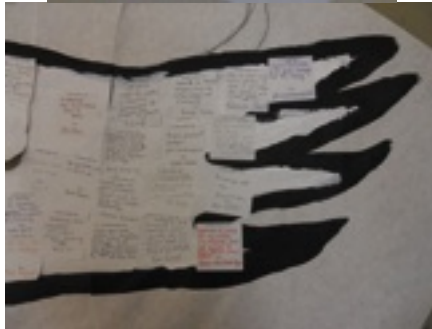
Appendix R

Group responses to questions (sample from Adams)



Appendix S

Bird (before, piece, assembled, finalized)



Appendix T
Information given to School Principals
(sample from Carpenter)

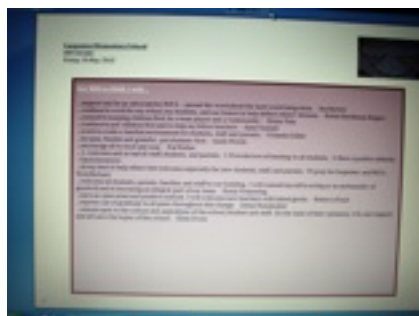
Our HOPES...



Answers to the 3 questions (group responses)



For MPS to SOAR, I will...



Appendix U

Thank you feedback emails

Friday, May 28, 2010 1:46 PM

To: [Snyder, Kathryn L.](#)

Fyi.....comment from a teacher regarding SOARS.....have a great weekend☺

From: Paulus, Sally L.

Sent: Friday, May 28, 2010 1:21 PM

To: Renfro, Tracy D.

Subject: thank you

Tracy,

Thank you so much for the meeting today. The brunch was perfect!! I thought the SOARS meeting was going to be a little awkward but I have to say that it felt good to reflect on what we do and know that we all have the same vision for our school. I was touched by the care that I felt from everyone so it was a good process for me. Thank you for encouraging, supporting and believing in us. I am a true admirer!!

Sally Paulus
Physical Education/Health
Chestnut Hill/Plymouth
923-3666

Saturday, May 29, 2010 10:52 AM

To: [Snyder, Kathryn L.](#)

Hi Kathy,

All of your hard work was very worth it!!! I want you to know that I did not have to go to yesterday's PD since I am part time and I had already met my quota. However, when I read your description in the letter, it sounded very interesting to me so I came on my own time. I am so happy that I did.

The staff at Carpenter loved it. They were a little hesitant about it on Thursday, but got very involved on Friday. It had super content and Margie, Tom and Marilyn were terrific facilitators!!

I sure hope that MPS is willing to buy into your philosophy, because that is not the way it is right now. If the teachers are happy, confident, etc. the children will blossom. As classroom teachers we all know this.

Kathy, the 1 1/2 hour presentation was re-energizing. I loved it!! It was a perfect time to do it, also. I look forward to part 2.

Thank you for all of your hard work. By the way, the teachers loved the interviews with the high school students talking about their elementary teachers. Please make sure to have more of those in the fall!



Rebecca

Saturday, May 29, 2010 10:57 AM
To: [Ellinger, Carl R.](#)
Cc: [Lipsitt, Linda S.](#); [Snyder, Kathryn L.](#)

Hi Carl,

I wanted to let you know that yesterday's PD was terrific. It was a true professional development event. It will make me a better teacher for the rest of the year and next year. Not only for my students, but also for my colleagues and the parents in my school.

I hope we can keep this energy going for next year. I would recommend doing a part 3 and part 4 of SOARs, if they exist. This is a program that could make a huge difference in our district.

Thank you for allowing Kathy Snyder to present her program!

Rebecca Faust

Wednesday, June 02, 2010 4:07 PM
To: [Snyder, Kathryn L.](#)

Kathy,

Thank you for a thought provoking session on Friday. Through the tears and laughter we expressed emotions that needed to be shared. We appreciate all your efforts at making our PD a memorable event.

Sincerely,

Debbie Chernich

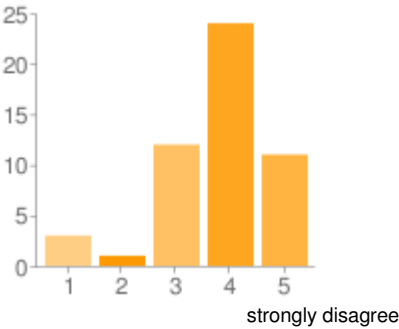
Appendix V

Participant Evaluation Results from Google Document (52 respondents)

I am a:

grade level teacher	41	79%
language teacher	1	2%
music teacher	1	2%
art teacher	0	0%
physical education teacher	3	6%
Principal	0	0%
office professional	0	0%
special services staff	3	6%
Other	3	6%

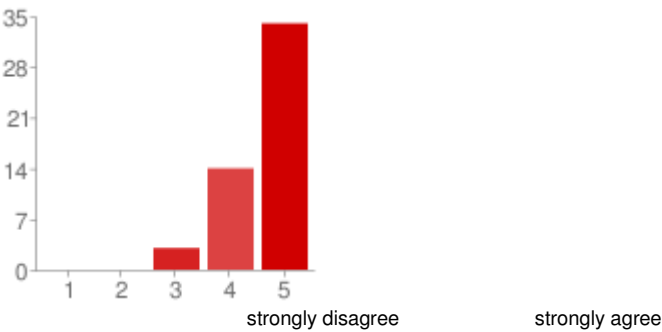
I enjoyed MPS SOARs.



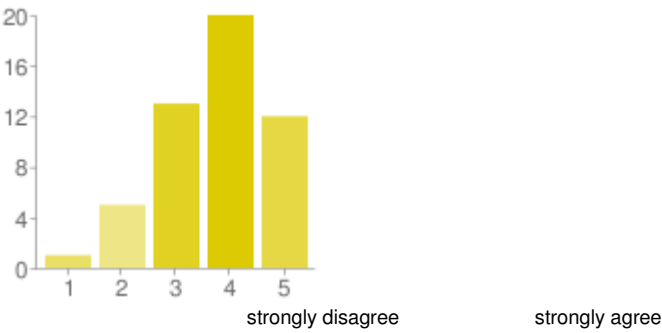
1 -	strongly disagree	3	6%
2		1	2%
3		12	23%
4		24	46%
5 -	strongly agree	11	21%

The program was organized.

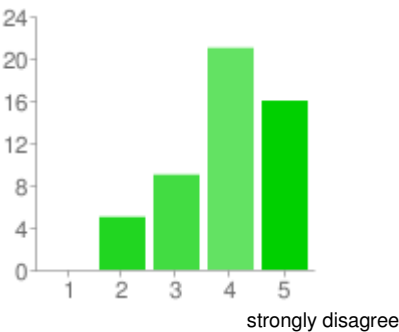




The opening activity (HOPES) was effective.

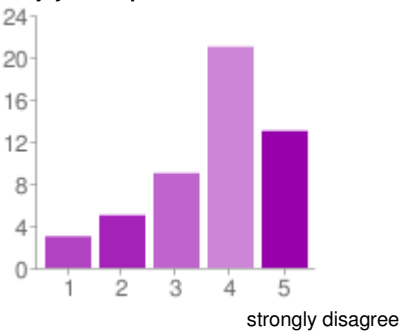


The video was a helpful introduction.



1 -	strongly disagree	0
		0%
2		5
		10%
3		9
		17%
4		21
		40%
5 -	strongly agree	16
		31%

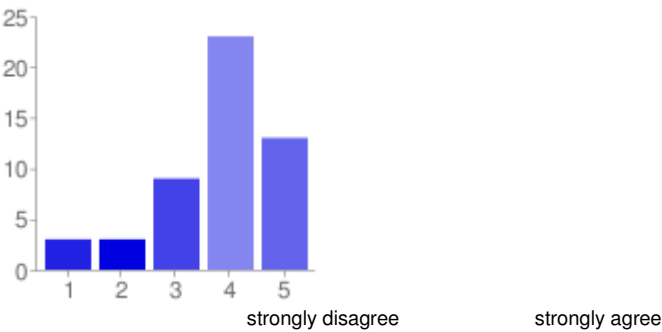
I enjoyed the paired interview.



1 -	strongly disagree	3
		6%
2		5
		10%
3		9
		17%
4		21
		40%
5 -	strongly agree	13
		25%

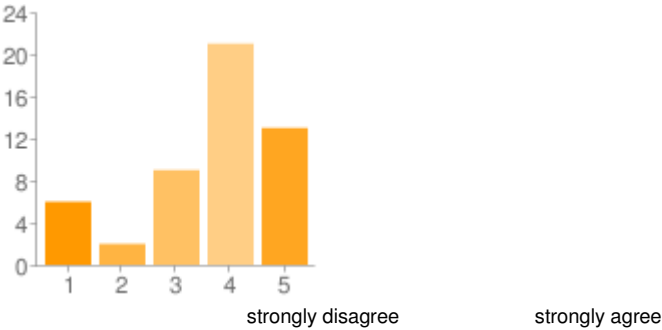
I enjoyed the group activity of summarizing the interviews (themes).





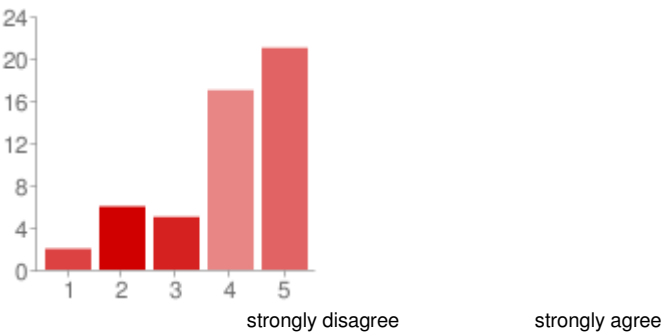
1 -	strongly disagree	3	6%
2		3	6%
3		9	17%
4		23	44%
5 -	strongly agree	13	25%

The closing sticker activity (For MPS to soar, I will...) was an effective way to close the day.



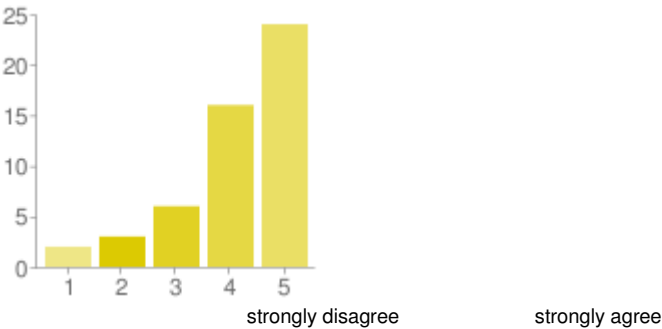
1 -	strongly disagree	6	12%
2		2	4%
3		9	17%
4		21	40%
5 -	strongly agree	13	25%

I appreciated the chance to reflect on positive past experiences in MPS.



1 -	strongly disagree	2
		4%
2		6
		12%
3		5
		10%
4		17
		33%
5 -	strongly agree	21
		40%

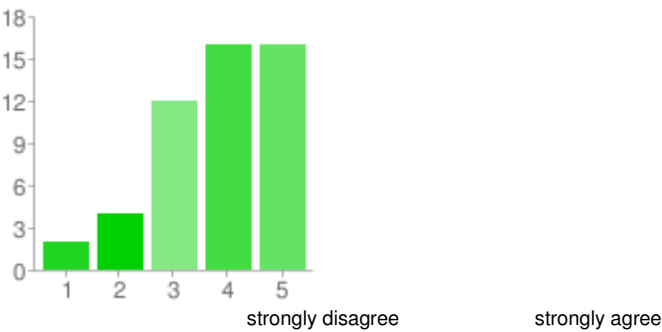
I enjoyed hearing other people reflect on their positive past experiences.



1 -	strongly disagree	2
		4%
2		3
		6%
3		6
		12%
4		16
		31%
5 -	strongly agree	24
		46%

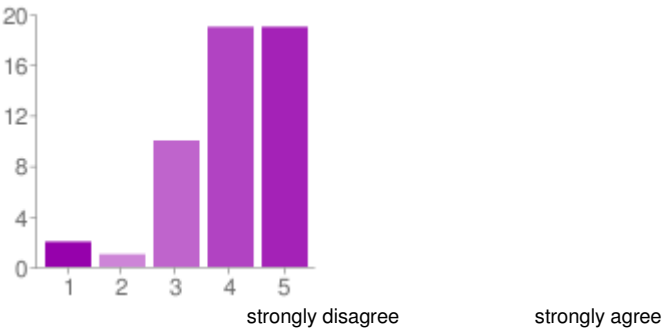
I appreciated the chance to reflect on times when I felt valued for my contributions.





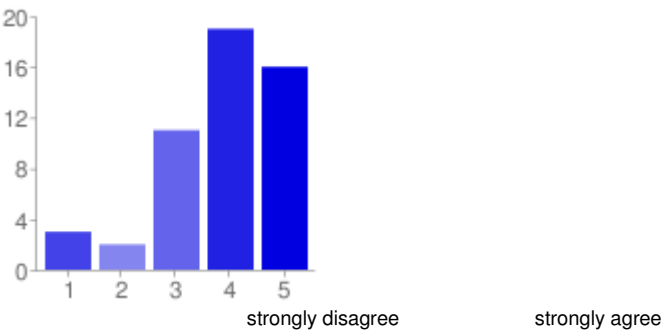
1 -	strongly disagree	2
		4%
2		4
		8%
3		12
		23%
4		16
		31%
5 -	strongly agree	16
		31%

I enjoyed hearing other people reflect on times when they felt valued for their contributions.

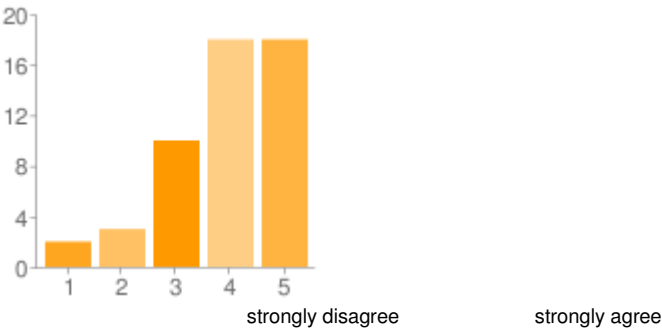


1 -	strongly disagree	2
		4%
2		1
		2%
3		10
		19%
4		19
		37%
5 -	strongly agree	19
		37%

I appreciated the chance to imagine a smooth transition in the fall.

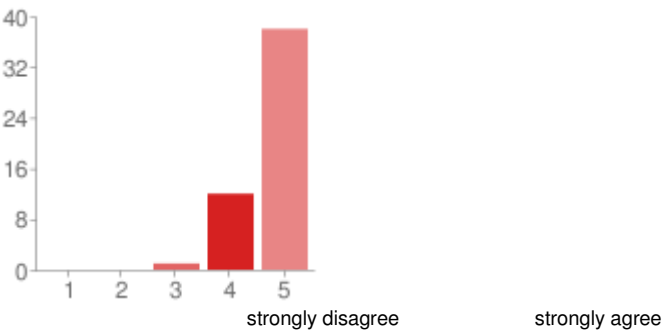


I enjoyed hearing other people's ideas for what would make for a smooth transition in the fall.



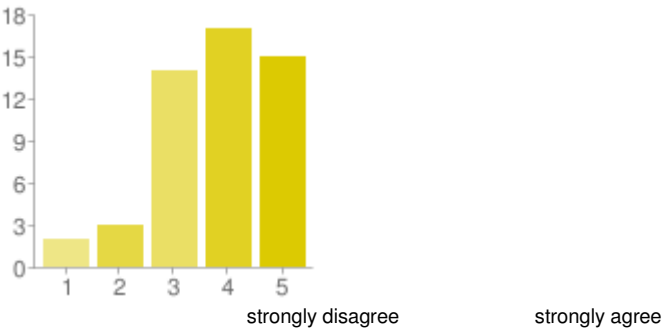
I feel confident that I can make a positive contribution to MPS.





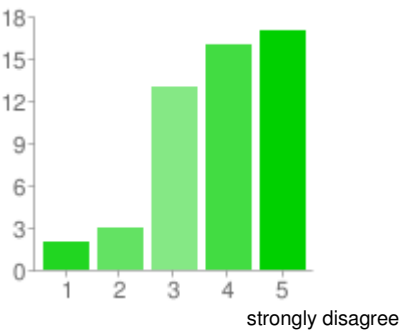
1 -	strongly disagree	0
		0%
2		0
		0%
3		1
		2%
4		12
		23%
5 -	strongly agree	38
		73%

I feel that MPS SOARs fostered optimism.

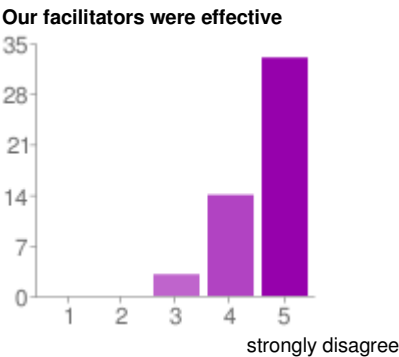


1 -	strongly disagree	2
		4%
2		3
		6%
3		14
		27%
4		17
		33%
5 -	strongly agree	15
		29%

I feel that important ideas were shared in MPS SOARs.



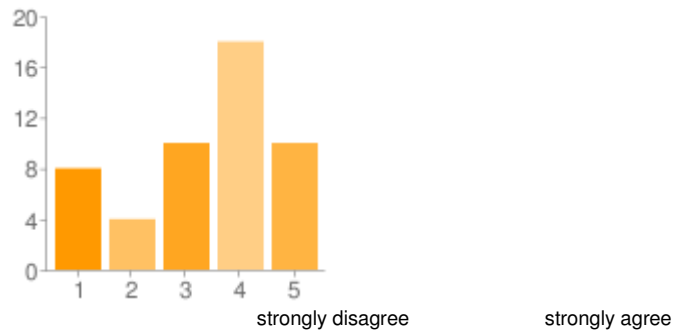
1 -	strongly disagree	2
		4%
2		3
		6%
3		13
		25%
4		16
		31%
5 -	strongly agree	17
		33%



1 -	strongly disagree	0
		0%
2		0
		0%
3		3
		6%
4		14
		27%
5 -	strongly agree	33
		63%

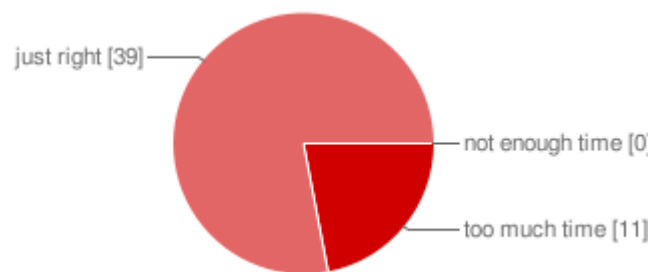
The timing of MPS SOARs (part 1) was effective (at the end of the year).





1 -	strongly disagree	8	15%
2		4	8%
3		10	19%
4		18	35%
5 -	strongly agree	10	19%

The time spent on MPS SOARs (1 1/2 hours) was



too much time	11	21%
just right	39	75%
not enough time	0	0%

If you could describe in one word your feelings about MPS SOARs so far, it would be...

Positive	Neutral	Negative
timely	I have mixed feelings.	sigh
helpful		insufficient
effective		unnecessary
satisfactory		adolescent
helpful		misguided
hopeful		uncomfortable
encouraging		negative
positive		late

uplifting		poorly timed
uplifting		
refreshing		
thoughtful		
encouraging		
productive		
positive		
fine		
Reflective		
Ok		
Optimistic		
Energizing		
Positive		
Positive		
Enjoyed		
eye-opening		
Reflection		
Encouraging		
Fine		
Pleasant		
Helpful		
Important		
Positive		



Many great things were shared on Friday. What should be done with that information?

- Share what we learned with new staff in the fall.
- It should be shared and used as a basis for conversation for improving staff morale across MPS.
- I think the point was to have staff with positive attitudes... Administrators were there too, to participate and hear comments. What should be done with the information has already been done. We shared it, summarized it, and reflected upon it. What else is there?
- Perhaps given to the remaining opening elementary schools to use for PD.
- I think the idea was good, however, the timing wasn't. Many people's mind were elsewhere (packing, retirements, etc). I feel fortunate to be in a building where we already know how wonderful our staff is. We also appreciate the support from the staff, parents, and community. WE know how lucky we have been to be in a building where everyone is respected and treasured. I don't think this really had much impact on a positive end of the year. We are already there! Furthermore, once we knew our grade levels and placement, we were back on track. The not knowing where we were going caused anxiety, but it didn't affected our professionalism. The information that was shared should remain with the people in that room! The memories and experiences are specific to that group. The schools and their personalities are all changing next year, and the experiences will all be different to the new school staff. Leave the information be.
- Made available for perusal ... perhaps posted on a website or emailed or paper copies in the workroom
- I think the stickers that we placed on our part of the puzzle needs to travel around to different schools next year as was suggested but first I believe that it needs to hang up for awhile in the Administration building so the people there can see all of the comments that teachers said. I think that is critical to this transition being what it needs to be.
- In the fall, explain how this information will continue to help the transition. How will our hopes be applied?
- Does something need to be "done" with the information? Or, was the value in the doing?
- Compile the information and then share it with the whole group.
- Provide time for same great support and collaboration.
- Please remind Administrators and MPS decision makers of the need for teachers to feel valued. So many do not right now for many different reasons. The developing philosophies of evaluating teacher effectiveness based on children's test scores has the potential to further de-value teachers to the point of no return. Please share this information with those who make decisions regarding the future of MPS in the hopes that it will remind them that before we can all SOAR together, we first have to BELIEVE in each other.
- Compile the information to show the common themes throughout the district as to what we all want for the transition and give it to each building to share or have it be presented at the opening day that we usually have at Central with all teachers present.
- Share with other staff members across the district and send out POSITIVE advertising and information to parents and the community so that they can believe in us again.
- I think sharing everyone's ideas with the staff brought us all together.
- I don't know that anything needs to be done with it. It was more of a chance to reflect & I think each person took something away to think about. That's all we really need.

-Taken to administration!! I think the teachers try to be positive, but there is a real STRAIN coming from higher than the principals. The positive morale needs to be the focus for next year!!! If the teachers are positive, the students will be better learners!

-I appreciate all of the energy that went into this program. I am not sure that the timing was optimum nor was the goal clear in terms of transition. Perhaps, it would be more beneficial in another setting. Nothing. Just having the time to reflect and share brought closure. The positive nature of the activities helped make the time spent with staff valuable, we will miss each other.

-Collect what everyone said from each school into one document and distribute to the teachers in the fall.

-ideas need to be implemented...collecting ideas and never acting on them has gotten really old. mps has become famous for asking for input and then doing whatever adm. wanted to do...it is a true roadblock to any sense of optimism. I have grown weary of collected info, data, ideas on chart paper and never seeing any of it put into action. too much of SOAR ended up being about vague ideas...few specifics were offered.

-guide central administration in decision making and leadership roles they serve.

-Acknowledging & building on our positives will be an opportunity for MPS to grow & develop positively. Recognize & determine weaknesses that exist because those habit will likely remain & emerge, yet again, if they are not addressed as well.

-It would be great to see the entire SOAR put someplace electronically to see or share the thoughts. I also enjoyed the Hope bubbles we created to see we truly are all on the same page.

-Shared with administration and the Board

-Share it again.

-I would like to see this information summarized and shared with each building that was involved.

Please use the space below to make any comments about MPS SOARs (feedback, questions, concerns, etc.) You may feel free to address any of the above questions as needed.

-Great way to reflect and look forward

-This just came at a bad time. People would have rather have been preparing for the end of the year and looking forward to next year. Many people saw it as a something to do in the PD timeslot. I think the SOARs idea is good in theory, but it felt forced upon us and not really looking at the needs of the teachers. We wanted time, and you took it. With all that is expected to be accomplished at the end of the year, it was one more stick on the load. "

-It was a nice way to share during a busy, emotional and stressful time. It was a reminder that we are pretty much all "on the same page" so to speak and want what's good for kids and value each other. I could imagine that similar activities in the fall will remind us of those points and begin to build a common bond with a new combination of educators.

-I am looking forward to this process again in the fall in my new building. My current staff is wonderful so there was no doubt in my mind how much we appreciate each other there. It was still a good task to undertake.

-It is interesting that as we began I was thinking so deeply about our school that when someone (a presenter) said something about our contributions to MPS I was a bit thrown off. I would feel very



differently commenting about my role/ experiences in the District as opposed to my roll / experiences in our building. I think the common theme is a part of our building. Not necessarily part of the District.

-I am sure it was more beneficial to the buildings that are closing.

-I enjoyed the unhurried opportunity to visit with my peers in a relaxed setting. We definitely don't get time for that anymore. I didn't need SOARS to do this...just time from the district.

-I would have liked to be able to share thoughts with our peers that are coming over to our building.

-I was happy to help a peer with her master's thesis.

-Thank you. It was the beginning of some necessary steps needed to re-build the morale and spirit of our staff.

-The timing was wrong. I need time to do report cards, all the assessment recording, packing, and moving. I could barely concentrate for all the stress I'm dealing with with packing up and moving for the fifth time in five years. I would like to end a school year on the last day for a change, like most everyone else.

-I think this is a nice way to bring the whole staff together - it is an experience we can all share and be part of.

-Considering that not all staff was moving to the same spot, there were parts of this workshop that were insensitive. Many people felt this was just a program to help someone to fulfill their program requirements. At some other point in my career, this may have been fun. Considering the stress of picking a position, a school, and the immense amount of packing that needs to be done, this was just not the right time.

-I would probably have rated this higher had I not had a huge list of things to accomplish with regular end of the year grading, report cards, etc. and packing my entire classroom. It's nice to feel positive but it would be easier to feel that way if I had had a chance to make inroads on my workload before SOARS took place. I do appreciate the time you took to bring this to us!

-Hopefully, at my age I have been introspective enough to know my own strengths, weaknesses, and above all else, to be thankful for a good number of things. I'm not a child. I don't need someone to guide me through their perception of how I should be focusing on the future. I love my job. I appreciate the necessity to consolidate buildings, and I'm sure everyone will continue to work professionally to create a welcoming environment for students and teachers alike. I try to live my life according to the words of St. Francis - give me the courage to change what I can, accept what I can't, and the wisdom to know the difference. That being said, I accept that we will continue to "SOAR" in the fall, though if I were in charge of the world, I would have the wisdom to know that staff members are extremely taxed for time in this crazy busy world. Everyone I talked with couldn't wait to get back to the mountain of work that would occupy them well into the weekend. Sorry, but that's a fact.

-It made me think of the quote "What can I do for my country?" What can I do for my school? - since the district is not doing it for me.

-Thank you.

-Although there was some value in SOARS, it was more of a team building activity than a help for transitioning. That seems to be something that would be more useful as we get together as a new team than as a look back at our old teams. In addition, I feel it might have hit the mark better if staff ideas from elementary schools were solicited instead of from high school staff members.

-Though many of us were not looking forward to spending our time this way, it turned out to be very positive and helpful. It lifted our spirits and helped us to feel valued and to value others. So many good ideas were shared. Thank you for your efforts - your caring, and for doing something to benefit all of us.

Much concern has been shown for children and parents. It was nice to know we are also important in this process.

-It was a nice session to feel good about our personal role in MPS, however so much of what we do is directed by central admin and school board. Their decisions are handed down and we implement and roll with their directives.

-Seems like a significant amount of time for prof. dev. that could be used differently." poor use of professional development time. This was not professional development.

-My only question is who asked teachers if they wanted this program in the first place? If it is for teachers but they didn't ask teachers if they wanted it then how much sense does it make to design SOARS for teachers when they weren't asked in the first place?

-People said the ""right"" things to say in front of others in a politically correct fashion. There were many wonderful experiences & ideas shared, but it lacked truths about portions of some realities. Thus, the collected information is skewed.

-Please do not take my poor responses above as an attack on SOAR...the program itself is wonderful and the activities are great. I was in a group with all people from my current building and was able to express some thoughts, but ironically the only reason I'm trying to leave my building is due to the lack of positive energy from several staff members. It made the experience a unique challenge. The idea behind this was a good one, the timing of leaving my building because there is not enough of this positive outlook...a bit off:)

Your ideas for MPS SOARs (part 2)

-team building

-Consider the timing. I know that you want to gather in the fall. However, you will now have staffs that are still getting to know each other and may make sharing inner most thoughts and feelings uncomfortable. People will want to hit the ground running in their new buildings and grades. Give them time to assimilate before you have them attend a "feel good program." Let people get comfortable with each other and get organized. I personally, don't want to sit through a 1 1/2 hour meeting if I still have boxes to unpack and a room to get ready for the year. Please don't let your good ideas get lost among the frenzy of a new year.

-How can we ease transition? How can our ideas of what we want to stay the same be implemented?

-I'm not certain what could come next. We will do relationship building with our new staff and it will work.

-The fall would be better, but not at our first PD.

-not at this time

-Shorten 'er up! About 30 minutes oughta do 'er!

-"Positive bonding for new staff. Get to know you activity. ""something you may not know about _____ is _____. "" "I was surprised to learn when I interviewed _____ to learn _____ about them""

Also, Rotary Leadership camp does great team building activities. Problem solving how to get everyone over a wall or walk a rope. It bonds people"

-Please gain more of a perspective from elementary teachers about what might be helpful.

-Keep it short - moving - and positive.



- Teacher will have a lot on their minds as they prepare for a new classroom and new students.
 - I am hopeful that part two isn't a "feel good" session. that is fine and perhaps some people need that, however, I think for the true purpose of prof. dev. we could come up with something better.
 - I think this program could be done in about 30-45 minutes if it is similar to the spring activity.
- After the staff was broken down due to HUGE stress from building closures & the position draft, etc..., "happy-ology" (as it was dubbed) came at a time people needed to get positives... Their positive account balances were drained due to circumstances, so they genuinely did not have much to give--they tried to do what seemed expected because it was required. Hopefully the SOAR program will aspire to be more than bandage for a wound that needs serious attention. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Let's SOAR to prevent such brokenness in the future.
- I look forward to using this as a way to get to know future staff members..thank you for the hard work!!!
 - Group talk arounds should be done in smaller groups. It got quite repetitive after the first 10 people. The last 15 people had a hard time coming up with new ideas.

Written evaluations (18 respondents)

1. What is your overall impression of the first part of MPS SOARs?

- Excellent! Liked the way we took a moment to remember the great ways we are validated by this community
- It was fun, energetic, and so positive.
- It was a well designed morning which allowed us to share our thoughts and concerns.
- Excellent, fun. It was great to be at a meeting where I felt good.
- I am impressed. It was fun and loved to hear others' opinions.
- Great! Very positive. It brought out the best in all of us.
- The presenters did a nice job, but the discussion was already info we've talked about. Didn't learn anything new.
- The program was better than I expected. It's nice to have a chance to share together.
- Enjoyed it
- The program was well organized and supportive presenters.
- fun, positive, interactive
- I was not impressed. This was more of a "team building" atmosphere than one for change.

- Great
- Well done!
- Very good. A good format for getting us to share and open up.
- Interesting, but I honestly feel our time could have been more productively used this busy time of year.
- Quick and good for teacher morale
- very positive

2. What did you learn about other staff members?

- Other staff, while they have their unique challenges and gifts, share so many similarities.
- More about them as people
- We all share similar hopes, dreams, and pride.
- We share the same concerns and ideas.
- We pretty much all feel the same.
- That I love them as much as I always have and respect their thinking and ideas
- The depth of their humanity
- What's important to them
- We are on the same page
- everyone is willing to change a bit and hoping the community will stay alive.
- That we share the same concerns and beliefs
- We care about one another! We feel a lot of the same things and appreciate our children. We put them first.
- They are wonderful.
- We are similar in thoughts and beliefs.
- What I already knew-I work with a great group of people. Positive, caring, forward-thinking.



- Everyone still has children as #1.
- motivations, what they valued
- we are connected and committed to our school/students/each other.

3. What ideas would you like to carry forward into the 2010-2011 school year?

- The importance of a welcoming attitude, flexibility, and humor.
- Helping other feel good about what they are doing.
- Things we talked about
- Work together as a team
- Humor, enthusiasm, and support
- The same positive attitudes and sense of humor
- continued support
- keep positive, team-building
- HOPE
- teamwork/positiveness/being intentional
- teamwork, humor
- The positive attitude
- community and friendship
- flexibility, professionalism
- Students are first NO MATTER what!
- I would like others to feel welcomed and feel part of our team/community.
- The ideas of teamwork, community, and kids first.

4. What do you think makes up the positive core of this teaching staff?

- There is a supportive spirit among staff that adds so much to our community.
- We are truly a team, enthusiastic and fun.
- kindness, family feelings, hard work

- we're positive with each other- always willing to support one another
- sensitivity, hard work, cooperation/collaboration
- kind, loving, accepting
- humor, we're flexible
- The individuals and their love for teaching.
- Our dedication to each other, to students
- organization and positive
- support each other, collaborate
- Humor, cooperation, acceptance
- Support and humor
- leadership
- Our principal's inspiration and the caliber of our staff.
- community-driven, flexibility
- community
- friendship/love of our school

5. What suggestions do you have to improve this process?

- Listing character strengths has value especially when entries are supported by personal example. The next to the final session may have been aided by more examples and fewer additions to the list.
- Thank you!
- would love to continue this again next year
- We need more things like this throughout the year.
- It was great! Organized, focused and I loved the video. I would love to hear more students talk about their memories.
- none, it was good.



- nothing...it was great!
- I thought this went well!
- none, thank you!
- Team building in the fall.
- Open door policy, open communication

Appendix W

Data Sorting and Summary

Bold responses were the most popular across all 12 schools. Data from each school is available from the author upon request.

HOPES:

Leadership

Vision

Flexibility

Diversity

Language

Professional development

Support services

Wellbeing for all

United students, parents, community

Humor

Welcoming

Student Opportunities

Small classes

Able to retire

Passion

Success

Openness

Reputation

Valued

Music

Art

Kids first

Quality education

Positive attitudes

Quality staff

No **more** cuts

Staff camaraderie

Treat day

Payday breakfast

Zumba

Coffee



HIGH POINTS AND STRENGTHS

These two questions reiterated many of the same points as above, particularly the bolded words and phrases. This makes sense as they hope to retain things that make their teaching careers great: discussing high points and strengths bring out those qualities.

IDEAL FUTURE

Small class sizes

Para support

Hope

Open-minded

Welcoming atmosphere

No teacher left behind

Support

Teamwork

Clear purpose

Stable

Consistent

Strong leadership

Choices

Everything gets there

Organized

Happy kids

Open communication

Camaraderie

Respect

Re-energized

Positive

Community

Humor

Collaboration

Passion

